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LOOKING AHEAD TO THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

Edited by
John B. Chethimattam

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A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

LOOKING AHEAD TO THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

Edited by
John B. Chethimattam

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Theological Contribution of Joseph Constantine Manalel

This issue of *Jeevadhara* is dedicated to its founder and general editor Joseph Constantine Manalel on the occasion of the golden jubilee celebration of his priestly ordination. Rather than the quantity of his theological publications his consistent and courageous leadership in theological thinking in tune with the concerns of contemporary world has made a great impact on Indian theologizing. His effective leadership reflected in the pages of *Jeevadhara*, the problems discussed, often in the radically new solutions presented has brought *Jeevadhara* to world attention.

During the fifty years of his ministry he has worked strenuously for a revolutionary change in theology. Rather than confine himself to the restricted dimensions of seminary theology he has presented a broader picture of theology as a humanistic field and directed the attention to activities and beliefs common to all people of faith. As the director of Kerala Catholic Students' League (KCSL) he prepared a fertile ground for seeds of a creative theology for the laity and published a series of pamphlets on various fundamental topics of faith. Later he founded the All Kerala Catholic Teachers' Guild and conducted a series of theology courses for teachers of high schools and colleges.

When he began the publication of *Jeevadhara* in 1971 it appeared as an immediate and appropriate response to an appeal Pope Paul VI had made on September 4, 1968, to a group of pilgrims: The events which follow one another in our times, the currents of thought which inform the modern mentality, the political and social movements which agitate our world, the subjects which today are of greater interest to the religious field all converge to a central question, which prevails over the consciousness of contemporary thought, and it is the question of the human. An examination of faith from below from the actual concerns of humans was the scope and ideal of *Jeevadhara* as a theological journal. Hence Liberation

Theologies and People's Theologies hold special fascination for J.C. Manalel.

One of his expressed concerns is the freedom of the theologians of India struggling to find a new path away from the colonial period India had passed through and the straight jacket of Western theology in which they themselves were trained. Conscious of the tension between the academic and pastoral goals in the Church, he made every effort to see that *Jeevadhara* was not under the direct control of any bishop or religious superior, who may be too prone to jump in and obstruct any new theological venture as disturbing to the faith of the people. So he registered the Jeevadhara Theological Society so that the activities of theologians could be governed by their own regulations and through peer criticism. Theologians have not only their own responsibility to the people, but also the specific task and competence to counsel in academic matters, evaluate, criticize, research and write. The ministry of the theologian is not only to the Christian community but also to the secular community. It was for this purpose that the Indian Theological Association was founded and inaugurated at Hyderabad on the occasion of a dialogue of Bishops and Theologians. It got its inspiration from J.C. Manalel who was also its first president.

Primary concern of J.C. Manalel is the centrality of the human person in theology. More important than protecting the traditional structures of the Church and harmony of different layers of its hierarchy, is the fulfillment, development and enrichment of the individual human personality. The priority today is to create a situation in which everyone is able to make a meaningful contribution to society and enjoy a sense of personal efficacy. Though person demands community, to be with and for others, in an ecclesial community there is a tremendous danger even today of the community dominating the person. Theology shows how the person and the society can blend with due respect for both.

Another need of theology in the changed situation of India is curiosity, growth by learning and freedom from ritual. Not only is Constantine Manalel somewhat innovative and creative in his celebration of the Divine Liturgy, but also iconoclastic towards all ritual in a broader sense, namely the repetition of foolish behaviour, for example, the assumption that academic degrees and diplomas have relevance for anything that matters.

So he gives great importance to People's Theology coming from the witness of persecuted Dalits, marginalized workers and the like.

I have organized the articles received as tributes to J.C. Manalel into three broad sections:

I - Indian Christian theology (Panikkar), the task of the theologian (Chethimattam) and of the religious (Mampra).

II - The place and role of Jesus Christ and his Biblical image (K.V. Mathew).

III. Vatican II (Veliyath); its aftermath of the recognition of religious pluralism (Painadath), the new vision of the structures of the Church (Puthenangady), the new role of the laity (Pathil), the new morality (Pathrapankal) and divergent views in the Church (Julian Saldhana).

These represent the main theological concerns of Fr. J.C. Manalel pointing towards a new theologizing in the third millennium.

John B. Chethimattam

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Indian Christian Theology

R.Panikkar

The mystery of the Incarnation is *Incarnatio continua*. Theologizing in India is not an exegesis of past texts but the expressing from the recesses of the Indic people of the ineffable experience of the living faith.

“Theology” is not just writing. It is foremost living: a conscious human living the mystery of that which some traditions call the divine. The major contribution of Constantine Manalel to theology has been his life. As a tribute to him I offer these overcondensed reflections.

* * *

Jesus was a jew. And this is not to be whisked away. Christianity has been a ‘reform-judaism’ for two millennia. This explains also for the anti-jewish movements inside christianity. The jewish authorities, after all, condemned Jesus, not because they were “perfid”, but because they were loyal to their Law, and were in conscience obliged to apply it to that young rabbi whom they considered nevertheless a good Man. Marcion, already in the second century, in spite of his theology (two Gods) and christology (docetism) had correctly seen the revolutionary consequences of the message of ‘Christ’. He upsets the religious establishments.

Jesus was a jew, I insist, but the risen Jesus is no longer a jew, in spite of the jewish name which the ecclesial tradition has given him in greek translation: Christ, *christos*, *messiah*, the annointed one.

Christ is resurrected human Life. This is the central meaning of the Resurrection. The christian is not just a follower of a good Man, as Jesus was. There have been innumerable great masters in world history. I am not a christian in the same way as I am a gandhian, a follower of Socrates or

Dr. R. Panikkar is internationally known as a first-class Thinker, Scholar and Author.

Kung Fu. I am not a christian because I believe in Yahweh either - leaving aside whether the *Abba* of Jesus was the God of the hebrew Bible. The Sanhedrin was not so wrong after all in suspecting Jesus of heresy. I am a christian because I have experienced, due to whatever (sacramental) power, that Christ lives in me and I in him.

Perhaps we should change that name because of the historical connotations of the last two thousand years, specially in the Orient, but also in the West. Yet, it is in and through Jesus that the christian experiences that mystery, which christians call Christ - as I have been trying to explain time and again.

Now, this mystery which comes to me through a concrete jewish and western history (I insist) transcends those historical and cultural limitations.

Let us come to the point. That experience, with all the limitations and needed qualifications, amounts to the incarnation of that Mystery in us: *Incarnatio continua*. This is the christian faith: not a declaration of dogmas, but a confession of a surrender, a love, a faith, which, to be sure, needs some intellectual articulation. This articulation has found its expression in the traditional dogmas of that tradition. Let us not confuse faith with belief, although we cannot separate them either - at least when opening our mouth, i.e., when confessing in words our beliefs. We need then a particular language within a historical tradition.

The "us", the receiver of that light which enlightens every Man, i.e., the subject of that incarnation, is a person, not an isolated individual but a centre of relationships which may extend in time and space for centuries and kilometers. This means that the incidence of the faith in Christ, the acceptance of the experience of the Annunciation does not fall on a *tabula rasa* or necessarily on a jewish-christian ground. In other words, the christian faith of the peoples of other parts of the world does not need to accept a foreign culture. In christian theological parlance, the *preambula fidei* are not the *postambula fidei*. What is needed in order to receive and understand christian faith, what precedes that act, is the *mumuksutava* of the vedantic tradition or other pre-requisites ("pre-understandings" and "pre-options") and not what succeeds to it: the tail of twenty centuries of valid and legitimate, but not essential interpretations of that faith. Those interpretations are only normative *secundum quid*.

When the grain of christian faith (we do not have another word) falls

into indic soil it penetrates into that very soil for growth and blossoming, and the results may be very different from the branches and fruits of other terrains.

Putting it plain: Theologizing in India, giving reason, explaining and, even more, being critically conscious of what does it mean to be christian, is not an exegetical activity of translating the experiences of past generations (western or perhaps also non-western) into indic vernacular jargons, but expressing from the inner recesses of the indic *psyche* the ineffable experience of the living faith. Even more, it has to be the result of a genuine incarnation of the mystery of Christ in the flesh of the people of the country.

To be sure, this cannot be an individual exercise or be done in a moment. It requires an ecclesial activity, as it has been in the West; it requires, further, a fraternal collaboration and confrontation with the elders of the same tradition, and I add with the representatives of the past traditions of the indic soil also - tribal, sanscritistic, modern, and what not. But it is not a copy, not a mere adaptation, not a superficial translation. Faith is not faith in the faith of others. Divine action is an ever new action every moment.

This needs an extraordinary confidence in ourselves and in others as well. I would say that it belongs to the same faith to have that trust in ourselves and in others.

I am quite prepared to accept that this is a mystical view of faith and religion, and thus of christianity. I am quite prepared to acknowledge also that for many people christianity is just an ideology, or to put it milder, just a doctrinal system. My only comment here would be that for the incoming third millennium that belief-system has not a very bright panorama either in India or in the West.

What all this entails is precisely the task of theologizing in India: a conscious living of that Life which has been bestowed upon us.

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The Dynamic Task of Theologians Today

J. B. Chethimattam

Theologians have a unique charism in the Church to analyze and criticise the belief systems with their own distinctive methodology. Indian theologians have to move away from the colonial methods and interpret faith in tune with the religious spirit of India, without, however, ceding to the various reductionisms that are popular today.

The Christian faith was communicated in the first instance not to any particular individual but to the Church as a group. Only the Church as a society enjoys the divine promise of indefectibility; the faith inheres in the Church inseparably, writes Avery Dulles, S.J.¹ Of course in that community of the Church there are different charisms (1 Cor 4: 4-10). Bishops hold the primary and direct pastoral role to give public expression to the doctrine of the Church, lay down norms for preaching, worship and Christian life. Theologians by their scientific training have the mission to reflectively analyze the present situation of the Church and of the faith in order to deepen the Church's understanding of revelation and even look for new pastoral initiatives. Teaching itself is not exclusively reserved to any particular group. Vatican II takes an organic view of the Church and states that the People of God as a whole is a living witness to Christ and shares in his prophetic office (L.G.#12). It readily admits in its *Gaudium et Spes*

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1 Avery Dulles S.J., *The Magisterium and Authority in the Church, Theology in Revolution*. ed. George Devine, Staten Island NY: Alba House, 1970, p. 35.

#54, that humanity is entering a new age with rapid advances of the human and social sciences and that new styles of teaching authority are to be expected. Hence it is very necessary to define clearly the parameters of a theologian's place and role in the Church.

Pastors who often mistake their ministry of the Mystery of human salvation as a power to control the physical body of Christ through the sacramental formula and organize at will also the mystical body, look upon the role of theologians as a kind of intrusion into their job. Several official documents have tended to picture the Pope and the bishops as the only living prophets in the Church and to state that the only role of theologians was simply to present the propositions of the Magisterium and to defend them with quotations from Scripture and tradition. But the traditional view on the important role of theologians in the Church was stated by Cardinal d' Ailly in the Council of Constance (1415) when replying to certain criticisms of theologians. He argued that they should have the right to vote: One cannot exclude from decisive vote the doctors of sacred theology who have received the authority to preach and teach everywhere. This is no small authority over the faithful. It greatly exceeds that of an individual bishop or an ignorant abbot or titular². Pope Paul VI indicated the specific role of theologians in the teaching mission of the Church: Deprived of the labour of theology, the magisterium would lack the tools it needs to weld the Christian community into a unified concert of thought and action, as it must do for the Church to be a community which lives and thinks according to the precepts and norms of Christ³. Often when Magisterium produced documents without sufficient input from theologians, they resulted in embarrassment to the Church. Such were for example many responses of the Pontifical Biblical Commission and papal encyclicals brought out during the Modernist crisis. Many scholars of comparative religion were surprised by the description of Buddhism by Pope John Paul II, which produced a great deal of protest from the Buddhist side. The initial community of Christians could easily live with the fact that Jesus' knowledge had its own human limitations and that his predictions of an immediate end of the world did not come true. People do not expect their

2. J.D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Collection* 27 : 561

3. Address to the International Congress on the Theology of Vatican II in 1966, AAS. 58 (1966) p.893

bishops to make glib statements on the findings of Biblical scholarship, new theological perspectives in a fast changing world, and the nature of liturgical evolution in history, about which they have not made any serious scientific study, and thereby create unnecessary divisions in the Church.

The reason for this is that Bishops' administrative and pastoral tasks do not require them to be theologians, and their attempts to reduplicate the work of theologians will leave both tasks imperfect. The charisms of the Spirit do not operate mechanically and magically when one does not take appropriate measures to avoid mistakes. Bishops and theologians serve the same people, though with different methods, and it is only proper that they should dialogue and collaborate. According to Congar the Church has traditionally been governed by conciliar methods and not by solitary personal decisions⁴. St. Cyprian who was both bishop and theologian states that ever since he became bishop he never made a decision merely on the basis of his own personal opinion without consulting the priests and deacons and without the approbation of the people⁵.

Academic Freedom

Freedom of research and publication is a serious issue with regard to Indian theologians. First of all the majority of them is trained in the Western tradition. Even if they make strenuous efforts to get out of that straight jacket their total attitude and method of operation remain Western for the most part. Besides, since most of them teach in ecclesiastical faculties over which Roman authorities exercise a rigid control, strict adherence to Roman methodology is mandated for them. Torn between a theological tradition which has little relevance to the Eastern context and the call of the Gospel from the hearts of the Indian people, they present only scattered reflections, mostly drawn from Western sources of dissent like Liberation Theologies or the outsider's view of Eastern religions. So there is no unified vision nor a school of theology with a definite Indian identity of its own.

But the Spirit of God and the Risen Christ calling from the hearts of people demand a strenuous effort to transcend the oppressive and obstructing framework in which Indian theology is still imprisoned. It is the very

4. Y. Congar, *The Layman in the Church*, Westminster: Newman Press, 1957, p. 128

5 Ep. 14:4, *CSEL III*, 2, p 512

nature of theologizing that calls for this courageous effort. As Krister Stendahl said in his inaugural address in 1968 as the Dean of the Harvard Divinity School, we cannot have the perfect theological system and then apply it. According to Gordon Kaufman, theological work is not merely the uncritical rehearsal of tradition. It is rather in each new instance a creative act seeking to deal with the most problematic dimensions of human existence⁶.

But the impossibility in the present ecclesiastical framework to carry on a theological adventure relevant to our living context is both a challenge as well as a great opportunity. Instead of investing all their talent and energy for producing a theology that is a secret language intelligible to hardly two percent of the population, theologians have to launch out into the broader faith concerns of the people. There is only one divine plan of salvation for all human beings and faith is God's free gift to all his children. Hence the proper place for theology is not the professorial chair in the seminary nor the church pulpit but the market place. As Harvey Cox put it in his book *On Not Leaving It to the Snake*, the purpose of theology is to serve the prophetic community. For this reason the place of theology is that jagged edge where the faithful company grapples with the swiftest currents of the age. Any 'theology' which occurs somewhere else or for some other reason scarcely deserves the name⁷.

The focus of this faith reflection is, as Pope Paul VI once told a group of pilgrims, the question of the human⁸. It is a humanism far different from that of the European Renaissance, which focused on the achievements of the Western man. It implies rather an exploration and evaluation of the significance of human experience as the human in all the cultures. Theology properly belongs to the field of religion dealing with the beliefs and behaviours and responses to whatever is considered worthy of lasting and universal commitment. Since divine revelation is not restricted to the propositional truths of the Bible but embraces everything that God said and did in nature and history, the specificity of theology comes from the light

6 Gordon Kaufman, *Systemtic Theology*, New York: Scribner's Sons, 1968, p. viii

7 Harvey Cox, *On Not Leaving It to the Snake*, New York : Macmillan, 1967, p. 14

8. *On the Church's Defense of Man*, U.S. Catholic Conference, Washington DC 1969

of faith under which everything is examined and evaluated. Faith sees things with reference to the ultimate goal and meaning of human life.

Faith itself, however, is a multifaceted reality, and different religions and theologies tend to emphasize one or other aspect of it. For the Hebrews faith was loyalty and fidelity to Yahweh, somewhat like the total subjection of a Middle Eastern people to their benevolent monarch. Abraham was willing to sacrifice his own son at the command of the Lord. For Buddhism *sraddha* or faith was confidence in oneself so as to take one's whole life in hand and take a leap in the dark without seeing or knowing what was really out there; it was a sort of magic ring that could transform the muddy waters of life into a crystal clear spring. This aspect of faith is indicated by Jesus when he tells his disciples that if they had faith as much as the size of a mustard seed they could even move mountains. For the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke faith is accepting the death and resurrection of Jesus as the salvific event for the whole human race. The Scholastic theologians of the Middle Ages reduced all revelation to propositional truths and made faith an acceptance of what God had revealed, relying solely on his truthfulness. Islam emphasized faith not only as obedience to Allah but also as belonging to the Umma. When one went out of the bosom of the community one lost also one's religious faith. Johannine writings bring the personal dimension of faith of ancient Judaism back into focus and present it as full confidence in Jesus the Son of God and as belonging to the believing community. In the multireligious context of India a Christian theologian has to integrate these various dimensions of faith into a single perspective.

Doctrinal content of faith also is of extreme importance for an Indian theologian. For the Western theologian the existence of the triune God is the central point around which all the human disciplines figure and condition one another and at which human beings confront the great issues of life that lie beneath the formal separation of the sciences and of the sciences from humanities⁹. According to Aquinas our intellect as a unitary power of understanding is informed by various perfections as we apprehend them, and yet also recognizes that those perfections like being, goodness and truth which do not imply any intrinsic limitations by

9 Michael J. Buckley S.J., *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 360 ff.

themselves are properly said of God before they are said of the creatures.¹⁰ The point of the argument is that our knowledge about things, their origin, activity, existence, perfections and intelligibility would all be anomalous and contradictory unless we postulated also an all comprehending infinite reality which we call God; all we apprehend are merely shadows and reflections of that one Infinite.

According to Eastern thought this is a mere waste of energy. All take for granted the reality of the Divine as One-without-a - second. Only the Charvakas or babblers deny the existence of God. Or as the Buddhists put it, any discussion of the existence of God is an existential heresy. In the words of Paul Tillich, No it is as atheistic to affirm the existence of God as to deny it¹¹. For to affirm or deny God one has to think of Him as an object out there, additional to one's self. That which is additional to anything, even a finite being, cannot be infinite and cannot be God. So the Self of all selves, the Womb out of which all reality emerges is not perceived either directly as an object out there, or indirectly through other finite forms. As Sankara says, the Divine is realized non-indirectly (*aparoksa*), as one sees one's own self.

So any genuine theology is spirituality and its ideal is mysticism. As St. Anselm told his monks in his *Prosologion*, God is best known as the source and ground and ultimate condition of all their experience. Theology starts not from mere wonder at the phenomena of nature as for the Greeks, but from an experience of God as one's deepest centre. It examines the impact of that deep experience on one's life. Israel did not start with any proof for the existence of God. Even the understanding of the world as a creation out of nothing had to wait for the input from Greek philosophy. Jews started their theologizing from the overwhelming experience of God speaking to them in thunder and lightning, and understood human existence itself as a first installment of a treaty he initiated with human race. As Harvey Cox says, we have to theologize with one foot in the discordant history of Israel old and new and with the other foot in the convulsive habitat of the frankly profane man of our late twentieth century¹².

10 *Summa Theologica* q. 7, a. 5, ad 8

11 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, I, p. 237

12 Harvey Cox, *I. o*, p.2

The task of the Indian theologian today is to get out of the system-building preoccupation and global pretensions of Western schools. Right from the Middle Ages from Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas through Kant, Fichte and Schelling down to Hegel and Karl Marx neat systems and great summas were the bane of Western thinking. India on the other hand starts from the deep craving of the human heart for liberation from present suffering, and searches for the ultimate and authentic meaning of life itself. Here all the means of right knowledge, teaching of elders, analogies and arguments and Scripture itself are just means for arriving at a deep realization of the ultimate Reality.

The principal concern is not God himself but the human and the world, which have to be organized with a synthesis of all available experience and in close collaboration with all forces for good. Here the illumination of the Buddha under the bodhi tree, the Law of God discovered by Hamurabi, Moses, Manu and Mohammed, all the avatars of Vishnu manifesting the Divine in differing worldly contexts and Jesus the one Incarnation of the Son of God definitively entering human history and inviting all to share the same divine sonship, are all integral to the one religious history of humanity. Though they make distinctive demands in terms of social organization and worship, they belong equally to all. They are not competing ideologies, but parts of a total experience. Hence a genuine Christian theology should not be in competition with other religions but rather in collaboration with them.

The Theologians' Responsibility

What a Christian theologian, however, has to avoid carefully is reductionism. Trying to escape from the system-building concerns of the Western tradition one can fall into the opposite extreme of having no total vision at all. One can do justice to the different religions only by recognizing the unique contribution of each to humanity. To affirm the uniqueness of the illumination of the Buddha is not to deny the uniqueness of the incarnation of the one Son of God as Jesus of Nazareth. One does not have to re-invent the wheel. The Buddha's insight into the emptiness and transitory character of the phenomenal world is unrepeatable like Einstein's discovery of relativity. The entry of the Son of God as Lord of history is an unrepeatable event that will go on disclosing its meaning for all members of humanity till the end of time, because it is the same Spirit and the Logos

that acted in Jesus that act in every other human being. That unique historical event does not make other historical events of Mohammed's *shijra* or Sankara's advaitic experience irrelevant to humanity. No human event or divine act in history can be simply reduced to its sociological or psychological factors. An ecclesiology that reduces the Church to sociological or political factors that contributed to its historical evolution will not be any theology but only sociology or politics. Similarly reducing St. Paul's encounter with the Son of God on the road to Damascus or St. Thomas's confession of the divinity of the Risen Jesus to the Hebrew understanding of the term 'Son of God' or watering it down to the Greek apotheosis of human emperors will deprive Christianity of its unique experience of Jesus after the Resurrection and all its religious meaning. Today it is the important task of Indian theologians to resist such temptations from whatever quarter they may come.

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The Role of the Religious in India Today

New Perspectives and Challenges

Thomas Mampra

An object lesson in communion ecclesiology for the Religious in India is the challenge of the Dalit community to work for them in an inter-congregational, ecumenical and interreligious apostolate coopting also the laity.

One feels delighted to join the company of friends, colleagues and students of J. Constantine Manalel in paying tribute to his wonderful personality, and his effective ministry during the past fifty years as a priest in the CMI Congregation. In paying homage to such a dynamic and dedicated priest and religious it may be opportune to reflect a little on the role of the Religious in India today and some of the challenges offered. In fact, religious life itself is an object lesson of the communion ecclesiology, a sort of theology in action. How we live and act speaks louder than tomes of theoretical discourse. Such an article may help to raise questions rather than to offer satisfying answers.

Context

India is completing fifty years of independence from colonial rule. Although many of the dreams of the people as well as those of the national leaders of the freedom-struggle have not been fully realized, one cannot deny the fact that since independence the country has taken giant strides and has done fairly well in terms of self-sufficiency in food and various agricultural products, modernization of industries, industrial output, gross national product, railways and telecommunication, national highways,

Dr. Thomas Mampra, formerly Rector of Dharmaram and of late Prior General of C.M.I. is at present Professor of Philosophy at Darsana, Wardha.

nuclear and satellite systems, and so on and so forth. Still India is one of the poor countries in the world with 75 million children not going to school 70 million children under five malnourished and nearly 200 million people without access to safe drinking water.¹ Communalism and fundamentalism raise their ugly heads whipping up religious and political passions. The question that poses itself to the religious of India in this situation is: What is the role they can and must play in redeeming this ambiguous situation in order to give to people a human and spiritual leadership that will sustain their hope and revitalize their creativity for a better future?

The Traditional Spheres of Apostolate of the Religious

Religious in India, hundred thousand strong, majority of whom women, though impressive in number, form only a small percentage of the Indian population. Still their dedicated life and loving service have benefited millions of people all over the country through their many and varied institutions in the fields of education, health care and other social services. Almost everyone who has had the privilege to receive any kind of service from this dedicated and self-sacrificing group of people will bear eloquent witness to the warmth and sincerity of their approach, efficiency of action and their great success.

On the other hand, there is a tendency to identify most of the Christian religious in India with the affluent sections of the population. Whether they actually belong to that category of people may be questionable; but from the kind of possessions their communities have, the sort of institutions and buildings that belong to them, though most of them are for public use, the levels of infrastructure they continue to establish in the name of efficiency and modernity, and to some extent their life-style in general have tended to create an image of wealth and security. Instead of their vow of poverty and life in common becoming a challenge to throw their lot with the poor and the marginalized and to share with them what they are and what they have, with their trust in the Lord, the religious in India, by and large seem to be somehow over-concerned to establish themselves wherever they are planted. It is also alleged that in certain quarters there is some reluctance to reach out to the more challenging fields of the apostolate and frontier areas.

1 Cf Mallika Basu, "Humanization of Development: The Question of Basic Needs", *Social Action*, July- September 1996, pp.246-248

Ecclesiastical boundaries and legal structures may also be hampering the movement of the religious to areas and peoples in need of their loving service.

Here arise several questions: Is it possible for these religious with their dedication and sacrifice to reach out to a larger percentage of people through their traditional and possibly more challenging fields of apostolate? Another question is the possibility of moving out to new apostolic fields and embracing innovative methods of approach. Yet another pertinent question is whether the religious are in the given socio-economic situation of the country catering to the people who are in real need of their service or are they rather helping to perpetuate the exploitative system of caste and class distinctions by catering mainly to the higher and richer classes, criminally neglecting the poor and the needy, the marginalized and the down-trodden who have nowhere else to go? Are we religious satisfied with the assumption that we are doing our best by running some prestigious institutions with consequent entry into the corridors of power and influence which somehow guarantees our power and security? What about the prophetic dimension of our call? The crucial question is whether we are willing and ready to leave the comfort and security of our homes and traditional apostolates and move to the service of millions of the poor who need and crave for our helping hand assuming a challenging life of solidarity with those for whom hardly any one including the government has the political will, time and energy. Nobody is under the illusion that a hundred thousand religious can solve the enormous problem. But our involvement in the situation can be a strong catalyst for the dawn of a change for the better for the large mass of people concerned.

Partnership with the Laity and inter-congregational cooperation

It may not, however, be easy to relieve a majority of religious from the present forms of apostolate in order to take up the new challenge. One way to solve the problem may be to initiate more dedicated lay persons into the charisms of the religious institutes concerned and make them partners in the apostolic activities of the institute. This will, to a great extent guarantee the continuation of the charisms of the founders in the apostolates concerned and at the same time enhance a healthy participation of the laity in the apostolate of the institutes and congregations. In the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on *Vita Consecrata* Pope John Paul II appreciates and

recommends this kind of participation. He says: In recent years one of the fruits of the teaching on the Church as Communion has been the growing awareness that the members can and must unite their efforts with a view to cooperation and exchange of gifts in order to participate more effectively in the Church's mission. This helps to give a clearer and more complete picture of the Church herself, while rendering more effective the response to the great challenges of our time, thanks to the combined contributions of the various gifts. Today, often as a result of new situations, many institutes have come to the conclusion that their charism can be shared with the laity. The laity are therefore invited to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission of these Institutes².

But this large group thus made available for the new fields of apostolate may have to be adequately prepared for the challenges they have to face in the new situations. One may also think of a wider and deeper inter-congregational collaboration of which the Pope speaks in the same Apostolic Exhortation mentioned above³. Such cooperation may open up also new expressions of religious life itself integrating life of prayer and action at a deeper level, practising more open and simple ways of living in solidarity with the people among whom they happen to live. Similarly it may open up new ways of collaborating with the laity, volunteers or otherwise, including officials of governmental and non-governmental bodies and organizations at various levels. It may in many cases, be a new experience of apostolic activity not in isolation from but in collaboration and solidarity with the people, which can provide a new inspiration for religious life and demand deeper authenticity.

Areas of Focus

Several studies on the Indian scene arrive at the conclusion that the problem of millions of people living sub-human lives is very acute in some states like Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The situation is conspicuous among the Dalits in these states. Their gradual awakening from the time of Gandhiji and Ambedkar is proving to be a mixed bag of benefits and evils. On the one hand they are more and more aware of their identity, and rights and privileges as citizens. On the other

2 *Vita Consecrata* #54

3 *Ibid* #52

hand, their battles at the polls for the village panchayat, state assembly and the national parliament, their growing self-assertion in economic, political and cultural fields create a lot of animosity and opposition from the non-dalit castes resulting in murderous attacks on the dalit community. Thousands of atrocities, though recorded, go nationally unnoticed. Though there is a legal framework in their support, justice is seldom meted out since often there is collusion among the powers that be⁴.

There is no easy solution to this enormous problem. Habits die hard and the privileged classes do not easily give up their positions especially against the levelling effect of liberalisation. The work involved is so strenuous and enormous that it is beyond the reach of any one religious institute or congregation. It demands concentrated and cohesive effort from the part of all the religious institutes. It may need also an ecumenical collaboration of the various Christian denominations. Wherever possible the participation of non-Christian communities may also be solicited so that this all important apostolate may develop into an action for humanity by all persons of good will, provided the search for wider collaboration may not boggle down to unending discussions and unnecessary disputes, which are liable to defeat the plan itself.

From another point of view, the apostolate envisaged will necessitate a rethinking of the financial planning for the integral growth and development of the underprivileged peoples in the above mentioned states. It is common knowledge that not even a fraction of the allotted funds reach the target groups for various reasons. Thus the problem with all its monstrous consequences remains practically unsolved. The help or partnership of non-governmental organizations shall have a vital role to play to bring about any appreciable change in the present situation. In view of the positive attitude of the government agencies concerned, the religious may well consider the possibility of taking up this tremendous challenge in collaboration with all the people concerned.

It has to be understood that here we are tackling the basic question of the existence, human dignity and development of hundreds of millions of people spread all over the Indian heartland. They belong to a variety of social groups, castes and sub-castes. A great deal of adaptation and

4 cf. A. Ayrookuzhiel, "The Dalit Church's Mission : A Dalit Perspective", *Indian Missiological Review*," vol. 18, no.3, September 1996, p. 37

integration may be necessary and it may even result in new forms and expressions of religious life more adapted to the circumstances and traditions of the people for whom and among whom they work. In other words, the challenge may usher in a more inculturated way of leading religious life as recommended by Pope John Paul II in his Exhortation (n. 80).

The religious in India are well organized on the regional and national levels. These regional and national bodies will have to entrust a detailed study of the matter to a task force, which shall also make specific suggestions for the actual working out of the plan in collaboration with the regional units in the states concerned. The presence of a number of religious institutes and personnel in the targeted states is a very positive factor. If the plan is well chalked out, one can reasonably expect it to be carried out successfully by the religious in collaboration with others.

Conclusion

It is not claimed that what has been unfolded above is the only challenge faced by the religious today. It cannot, however, be denied that it is one of the most important challenges. Facing up to it will be beneficial not only to the many millions of the underprivileged in terms of their survival with dignity and a hope for the future, but also for the religious in India as a whole in terms of much needed and talked about renewal, integration and inculturation. It may also help the emergence of new expressions of religious life, more suited to the signs and needs of the time leading its members to a life of loving dedication to God and his people in radical simplicity and transparent authenticity.

Darsana

Sawangi Meghe

Wardha - 442 001,

Jesus Christ the Sanatana

Mathew V. Kuzhuvelil

The title Son of God applied to Jesus in the Gospels in its Old Testament meaning did not designate a physical and ontological relation of a biological son to God. In the Greek use 'son of God' was applied to many kings and gods. It is in the existential realm of the human that Jesus is the Son of God in action, the active presence of God. It is in this dynamic meaning that Jesus has to be interpreted in Asia.

Who is Jesus Christ? This is a question very often raised in India by Christians as well as people of other faiths¹. Many seekers and Bhaktas have attempted to answer the query out of genuine concern. No one ever claimed any finality to their interpretation of Christ. The interpretations varied but the quest was the same, namely Jesus Christ the Asian saint. Although he was an Asian he was being interpreted by categories unfamiliar to the Indian mind. The Judaeo-Hellenistic thought was the media through which Jesus was introduced by the Western writers to the world. It is still questionable whether the terms applied to Jesus from this background have been rightly understood and interpreted by those writers.

A fresh attempt is made in this paper to interpret Christ to the Indian mind in the light of a study undertaken of the terms applied to Jesus in the Bible. Certain formidable factors stand in our pursuit. It is really difficult

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for us to penetrate into the raw fact of Jesus Christ. The Bible is our primary source book in this regard. Although we get biographical information from the Gospels, we cannot rule out the faith-influence of the early church on the writers. The Gospels are the interpretations of the community of the faithful. They were written more than half a century after the death of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, we have to depend on the New Testament witness.

The New Testament writers have virtually nothing new except a hermeneutics of Jesus Christ in the context of the Hellenistic world. In that process the basic semantics of the terms from the Old Testament has not been properly looked into. Their concern was to interpret Christ to their contemporaries.

Since our concern is to understand Christ and interpret him in the Indian context we may have to follow the pattern adopted by the New Testament writers but not the methods. A right semantic approach is to be followed in understanding the Old Testament terminologies used with the name Jesus Christ.

Primary Concepts

1. Jesus

The word 'Jesus' is an Anglo-Saxon derivative from the Hebrew word *Yeshua*¹ which means a saviour. We have to see why and how this name was given to Jesus. Among the Hebrews naming the child was a significant occasion. They considered the aspirations of the parents whether hope or despair reflected in the name. The daughter-in-law of Eli called her child Ichabod saying glory is gone from Israel because her husband was killed in the battle.² Naomi called her own name Mara because the Lord did very bitterly with to.³ When Jesus was born his parents shared with fellow Jews fear and despair because they were under foreign yoke. The Apocalyptic literature of the Intertestamental period bear witness to a fierce fight between the sons of light and the sons of darkness.⁴ A saviour would come and intervene to deliver the children of light. Mary the mother of Jesus, Simon, Hanna, Zachariah⁵ and others in the N.T. period might have shared the beliefs of the Qumran community who waited for the Saviour. Here in

2. 1. Sam 4.21-22

3. Ruth 1.20 (4) T.H. Gaster - *The Dead Sea Scroll*, pp. 1-17

5. Bk. 1.46-55, 2.21-31, 1.67-79, 2. 36-38

the name Yeshua we find an intense desire of his parents for a saviour. Every parent longed for the arrival of the saviour and hoped that their own child could be the expected saviour. He might reveal his power in the political or religious arena. Jesus' parents were no exception. By calling their son Jesus they were genuinely expressing the ardent desire of their times.

2. Christ

This word again is the Anglo-Saxon derivative from the Greek word *Christos* which, of course, is a rendering of the O.T. Hebrew term *Massiah* meaning the 'anointed one'. We may understand it as the 'Abishiktha of God'. Anointing is an act of consecration of a priest or a king or a prophet, a symbol of empowering a person by the Spirit of God. The Abishiktha is believed to be possessed and guided by the *Pavitratma* of God.⁶ The Massiah (Messiah) is the visible moving spirit of God. He utters the word of God and acts on behalf of God. He is the chosen one fulfilling the commission assigned by God. Since Christ (*Christos*-Massiah) is a man although chosen and anointed by God, is never equated with God in the Old Testament. His unique personality and charismatic gifts are acknowledged. Messiah, the king is addressed as the 'son of God'⁷ not in terms of consanguinity but by his special relation to God conferred on him through the act of anointing.

3. The Son of God

'Ben' the Hebrew word for son has been used with different meanings in different contexts. '*Ben Elohim*', the Son of God is to be understood from the O.T. background. Jews who used this terminology held a very strong monotheistic faith. Perhaps monotheism is the unique contribution of the Jews to the world of religions. They neither accepted pluralism in the divine world nor maintained a consanguineous relation to Yahweh their God. Terminologies depicting consanguineous relation with God are carefully avoided in the Old Testament. Even the term 'Father' is very seldom used. God is unique. He is alone and has no kith and kin.⁸ God is *sui generis* and therefore the O.T. has no theogony. It is in this thought-background that we should interpret the expression 'the Son of God'. It does not mean in a

6. 1 Sam. 10. 1,6; Isa. 61.1 (7) 1 Sam. 7. 14, Ps 2.7, Heb. 1.5 (8) Dt. 6.4

physical sense a father-son relation. The term stands for an extraordinary person having qualities⁹ which the ordinary mind finds difficult to comprehend. Some times the term signifies a member of a guild, order or class.¹⁰ 'Son of a prophet' does not mean the immediate physical son begotten by a father who is prophet but one who belongs to the prophetic guild. In the same sense 'the son of God' does not mean God's son in a filial relationship but one who belongs to God or one with divine understanding.

The title 'Son of God' is ascribed to the king, the Messiah or Christ in the Old Testament.¹¹ It is conferred on him at the time of enthronement. In Israel the king was regarded as the adopted son of God. He was chosen by the people and consecrated by the priest or the prophet as leader of the people of God.¹² The function of the leader (*Nagid*) was to lead the army of Israel against the enemies and deliver the people from oppression and slavery. Massiah thus becomes saviour too; in the O.T. language Christ Jesus = Massiah Yeshua'. So it is through the function of the leader of the people that they regard him the anointed saviour of the community.

Since the king is the anointed one of God, governing the people on behalf of God, the real King of the people of God. The ruler is acknowledged as the king of glory and has universal kingship.¹³ It is in this capacity that the king is acclaimed as the 'Son of God'. He has to execute justice and righteousness to the people on behalf of God, his father.¹⁴ In the exilic period justice of God was revealed in the liberation of the community from the Babylonian exile.¹⁵ According to the O.T. concept the king executes justice and salvation for the people of God in the socio-political realms. He is Jesus, the Christ of God to those who acknowledge his rule or in other words he is the one who governs the Kingdom of God.

In the Hellenistic world of Jesus' times the expression 'son of god' was familiar. Any one regarded as a prodigy or superman was believed to be a son of God. The extra powers that person possesses must be from some supernatural powers and not from a human being. The Old Testament concept of the Son of God when translated into Greek must have been influenced by the Hellenistic connotation. When the Centurian exclaimed

9. cf. Gen. 6.2, 4; Job. 1.6, 2.1, 38.7

10. 1 King. 20.25, 2 King 2.3, 5, 7 etc. (11) 1 Sam. 7.14, Ps. 2.7, Heb. 1.5

12. 1 Sam. 9.16 (13) 1 Sam. 12.12, Dt. 33.5, Ps. 5.3, 24. 7-10

14. 2 Chro. 9.8, 2 King. 8.15 (15) Is. 45.8, 24, 51.6

'Truly this was the son of God' what he meant was that 'He was a son of God' ¹⁶. Compare also the expression 'only begotten son' in Jn. 1.18. In both places the definite article is not found in the original Greek. To the Greek-speaking community Jesus Christ was a son of god, a person *par excellence*.

4. The Virgin Birth

We may have to examine the infant narratives of Jesus Christ in this context. According to the Gospel writers Matthew and Luke, Jesus was born of a Virgin.¹⁷ Matthew takes it as the fulfilment of an Old Testament prophecy by Isaiah of Jerusalem.¹⁸ A careful study of the Hebrew word used for Virgin in Is. 7.14 would disclose the truth that Matthew had used the wrong word for its Hebrew original. Certainly he has been influenced by the Greek translation of the O.T. and the Greek concept. The Hebrew word *Alma* means 'a young woman of marriageable age or sexually matured or a newly married woman.'¹⁹ The Septuagint rendering of this word is *Parthenos* which means a Virgin. Only the Lucan Greek text gives the correct rendering namely *Neanis*. It was necessary for the Aramaic-speaking Christians to translate the Hebrew concept of the 'Son of God' to the Christians of Hellenistic culture. In the light of what Jesus said and did, they found it convenient to use the term *Parthenos* which would without question help the Greek-speaking believers to accept the divinity of Jesus Christ. They could acclaim him as a Son of God. No one dared to question that position because that was the normal understanding of the people of the Hellenistic background. Such a position cannot be taken from an O.T. point of view.

Jesus began his public ministry as an adult. The audience listened to him and the people met him, saw in him a person extraordinary, a man of integrity and courage with outstanding charismatic gifts. He spoke with authority not like the Rabbi of his times. The people believed his words and accepted him as the Teacher unique. The response of the people was not on account of his birth but on the basis of what they heard and saw in him.

It is surprising to note that the infant stories are not found in the first Gospel Mark and also in the last Gospel John. Had it been so significant

16. Mt. 27.54 (17) Mt. 1.22, Lk. 1.26-33 (18) Is. 7.14

19. cf. Gen. 24.43, Ex. 2.8, Prov, 30.19 etc.

all the Gospel writers would have included it in their biographies of Jesus Christ. The first believers addressed him 'Son of God' but Jesus himself maintained an eloquence of silence on that terminology. On the other hand, he was zealously repeating the title 'Son of Man' while referring to his message and mission. Jesus was always trying to correct the popular misunderstanding concerning his person and the nature of his mission. He corrected his disciples on their confession of him as 'the Christ, the Son of the living God'.²⁰ He questions the Pharisees concerning the title 'the Son of David'.²¹ His silence over the term 'Son of God' too was to silence the popular wrong notions concerning his personality.

5. The Son of Man

Since Jesus is vehemently defending his being the 'Son of Man', it seems that he was trying to discover his self-identity not in his divine relation to God, the Father but in his identity with the ordinary people among whom he moved with his mission as a humble servant. The Aramaic equivalent of this term *bar Nasha* simply means 'a human being'. This has been used eighty one times in the Gospels.²² In common parley it does not connote anything extraordinary but just a human creature. We find this expression in the O.T. in the book of Ezekiel and Daniel.²³ In Ezekiel it stands for the prophet who lives among the exiles and is one among them. In Daniel the 'Son of Man' stands for the one who rules the world on behalf of God and finally leads them back to God. He is the ruler and the representative of the ruled ones, the saints of the Most High.²⁴ In the book of Enoch the son of man is delineated as one possessing supernatural powers. This term has at least five different connotations. They are (i) the humankind, (ii) a prophet, (iii) a title used by Jesus himself, (iv) Supernatural figure, (v) the Saints of the Most High.²⁵

There are two views concerning the meaning of the term used by Jesus. Some hold the view that Jesus sharing the apocalyptic hopes of his times realised himself as the Son of Man as in the Book of Daniel. Others, think that taking into account the entire life style of Jesus he must have thought of himself as a normal human being. Moreover, we find that Jesus acted

20. Vide Mt. 16. 16-23, (21) Mt. 22. 41-45.

22. *Bible Bhashyam*, Col. 434c (23) Ezek. 2. 1, 3.1, 4.1, etc. Dan. 7. 13, 27

24. Dan. 7.27 (25) *Bible Bhashyam*, Ibid.

against the false and wrong notions of the Messianic concepts of his day and therefore must have deliberately used the term to confirm what St. Paul later affirmed in the Christological hymn in Phil. 2.1-11, that 'he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men'. The term represents the frail humanity rather than the glorified Messiah.²⁶ It also can mean that the human ought to be created in the image of God. According to Paul, Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the true human whose image of God is not vitiated or tarnished by sin.²⁷ In fact, we may say that through perfect obedience Jesus maintained the transparent *imago Dei* through which one could see the true humanity and true divinity. Those who witnessed him could say that Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of Man as he revealed the true self of God in and through the very actions which he did in life.

Jesus' mission was to reveal the name of God.²⁸ The name does not stand for the personal identity of an individual but it reveals the essential characteristics of the person by what he does. In the life and work of Jesus we find a love-response to others whether they are friend or foe, sinful or holy, Jew or gentile, man or woman. The agapaeic response of Jesus was not always a result of pleasant memories. It sometimes evoked from painful agony, the agony of the cross. However, in such experiences he never failed to call upon God and he addressed him 'Abba', a very endearing term a Jewish boy used to call his father. It was through this language of love that he attracted men and women to himself. People forlorn, forsaken, marginalised, despised were given hope and meaning through Jesus' love for them. As Jesus moved among the people in this manner, they could easily recognise in him God's action on behalf of the oppressed community. The name of God, Yahweh, was revealed to Israel when He redeemed them from the yoke of Egypt.²⁹ God did show His love to slave community not because they were a mighty nation but because of God's inherent nature of love.³⁰ In the life and message of Jesus, his contemporaries could see the revelation of the God of redemption, the Lord Himself, the unutterable name YHWH. It reveals itself only in action.

The revelation of God in Jesus Christ has to be understood in this new dimension. It is in the existential realm of the human that Jesus reveals the

26. Phil. 2. 7-8 (27) cf. Col. 1.15

28. Jn. 17.26 (29) Ex. 3.14 (30) Dt. 7. 6-7.

active presence of God. In other words, it is the verb of God's reality that is revealed in Christ and not the unfathomable being of God's reality. No one can see it and no one has seen it except Jesus who has revealed *his glory* as an only begotten son.³¹

6. Jesus Christ, the Lord

God's active presence was revealed to Moses in the Old Testament.³² It came through as *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*. It means 'I will be that I will be'. The will-be-ness is the medium of communication of the reality of God. EHYEH is the first person imperfect of HWH or HYH which means 'to be'. It suggests that God's reality is not communicated through his total reality as such but through his constant active movement. This could be either for judgement or for blessing. It is through what He will be, that He reveals what He is. There is always an active becoming on His part. When the recipients acknowledge the He-will-be-ness either in their favour or against them, they confess Him YHWH which is the third person imperfect of HYH/HWH.³³ This dynamic concept of the Reality of God revealed in the Old Testament in the context of history, has been converted as a static Being when rendered by the Septuagint translators.

Due to the great reverence shown to God by the people of the Old Testament, whenever the four letters YHWH occur they hesitated to utter the name, instead they called that Reality *Adonai* (Lord). The four letters were the sacred *Tetragrammaton*. Jesus Christ was addressed by his followers by this substitutionary name for God. For the disciples, Jesus was the Lord and Guru.³⁴ Both ideas are included in *Adonai*. In Jesus they witnessed the dynamic redemptive acts of God. The revelation that they received through Jesus was not different from what the people of the O.T. received through YHWH. So the old and new books of the covenant (the Bible) were recognised by the followers of Christ as the records which bear witness to the act of the same God. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ may be described as the dynamic Verb of God's reality rather than the Being of God. The Being, that is the 'ISNESS' of God cannot be witnessed by any human being but only God's 'DOESNESS' or the Verbal reality.

31. Jn. 1.18 (32) Ex. 3.14

33. vide Brown, Driver & Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 217f

34. Jn. 20.28, 13.13

Jesus Christ, therefore, is the visible Verbal Reality of the Dynamic YHWH whom the people of the Old Testament testify in their historical experience. In a sense it is through the dynamism of the becoming of YHWH that we get a glimpse of the Being of God. That is what the early believers in Christ experienced.

7. Born of the Holy Spirit

We have the Christ who was the anointed son of God. The Spirit of God was upon him according to Luke.³⁵ According to Matthew Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit.³⁶ What does this expression mean? The words anoint and spirit are closely related. The anointed person is one who is gifted with the power of God. He is a charismatic personality. The Spirit of God in the Old Testament (*Ruah*) is the power of God. It stands for the invisible effective presence of God. Jesus Christ has shown that effective presence of God right early in his life. It was an inborn reality in him. Therefore, the writers of the Gospels trace that reality from his infancy. Mark and John take it as beginning from the day of his baptism, the day from which Jesus was obviously aware of his vocation.³⁷ As he began his ministry, people could witness in him and through his message his very intimate relation with God whom he called Abba. The writer of the fourth Gospel also speaks of the *Shekinah* that dwelt with humanity. It is in this sense that he records the fact of Jesus' birth which to the writer was 'the word becoming flesh.'³⁸ We see that the early witnesses of Jesus Christ saw in him God's powerful words and deeds. So the church continued to confess that Christ was born of the Spirit.

8. The Jesus of Indian Concerns

A semantic investigation we have so far followed does open before us a new vista of truths. The name, titles, and concepts used by the Biblical writers in connection with the name of Jesus Christ do evolve from a particular socio-religious and cultural thought world. They have their bearing on the faith of the later believers. In fact, such terms should be understood from their background and have to be taken as a pattern for hermeneutics.

35. Lk. 4.18 (36) Mt. 1.20 (37) Mk. 1.10-11, Jn. 1.32-34 (38) Jn. 1.14

1. *Yeshua' the Asian, the Abishikta of God*

So far we have interpreted Christ, although He is an Asian, in western mainly Anglo-Saxon categories. Jesus who was a Jew born in one of the Asian countries, was first interpreted in Hellenistic terms for the Gentile world. To us in India, he has not been interpreted apart from the Judaeo-Hellenistic enclosures. Not only so, but when he is being interpreted to us he should be freed from western thought-prisons too.

As we look at Jesus he becomes to us a fellow Asian, Yeshua' the *Abishikta* of God. He was truly man whose will was entirely committed in obedience to fulfil the will of God. He was being chosen as a vehicle to carry forward the rule of God on earth. *Pavitratma* was at work with him. Because he was conscious of his mission right from childhood his witnesses referred to him as the son of God. However, as his inner consciousness whispered that he is truly a human being he openly acknowledged it. A human being whose *imago Dei* was perfect in reflecting the image of God: St. Paul testifies to this by saying that 'He is the image of the invisible God'.³⁹ He was the *Atma Swarupa* of God. A follower of Christ led by the same *Atma* could see the *Atma Swarupa* in Jesus. Only such could confess him as Lord.⁴⁰ Jesus' intimacy with God led him to address Him Abba and he constantly maintained his relation with God through prayer and communion.

2. *Yeshua' the Revealer of the Human*

Not only Yeshua' was an *Atma Swarupa* but also *Manushya Swarupa*. The typical human ought to be Yeshua'. Only the *Atma Swarupa* could be the *Manushya Swarupa*. A true human is the one who reflects the image of God in him in truth, that is, by being truly an *Atma Swarupa* he becomes a true human being. One who is in/with Yeshua', the *Abishikta* of God is the new human being or in the traditional faith-language 'the saved one'. It is in this sense that M.M. Thomas interprets salvation as humanisation. To be a believer in Yeshua' means to take a decision to be a full human being.

The perfect obedience of Yeshua' to the will of God made him a Son and a Servant at the same time. His divinity is revealed in the servanthood. By becoming an abject slave, although he was the *Atma Swarupa* of God, his

39. Phil 2.9-11

(40) Jn. 20.28

Father raised him from the dead and conferred on him a name above all names 'Yeshua' the Lord, to the glory of God, the Father. When that happened Thomas, the Apostle to India confessed him 'My Lord, my God.'

In India Yeshua' comes as the deliverer of the oppressed people, the Dalits and all who undergo slavish, inhuman experience. With Yeshua' they are the *Abishikta* of God. Where the poor are redeemed Yeshua' is at work in the Asian context, there the humanity is restored to the image of God. Where human dignity is upheld in the name of Yeshua', there the people are anointed by the Spirit of God.

3. *Yeshua' and Abishikta*

These terms represent the two poles of religious experience, the human-redeemed and the divine-acknowledged. The first is the human experience of salvation and the other is the divine confirmation. We begin our new humanity with Yeshua' and we will be acknowledged as the children of God by the anointing of the *Pavitratma* and thereby we will be called *Christians* - Christ - in - ones.⁴¹

In one person the two poles of religious experience are met. Yeshua', the *Abishikta* is the unique revelation of the verb, the *Kriya* of God in the existential realm of the human and it points to us the *Marga* for the human ought to be and provides us the true spiritual energy to be in the process of theosis as *Abishikta*.

4. *The Sanathanathua of Yeshua' Abishiktha*

We have already seen that Yeshua' was addressed by his disciples Adonai which means both Lord and Guru. But it is the same term that has been used as a substitute to address YHWH, the eternal One (cf. Moffat's Translation of the Bible). God of the Hebrews revealed in the Old Testament was not in the form of a Being but they experienced God as a becoming, as ever dynamic, active although invisible but experiential as God of judgement and salvation on their behalf in the existential realm.

In the person of Yeshua' of Nazareth his contemporaries could recognise the manifestation of the salvific reality of YHWH of the Old Testament. Just as YHWH did wonders at the hands of Moses for the sake of the oppressed slaves in Egypt, because of the perfect obedience of His *Atma Swarupa* - Yeshua' YHWH continued the manifestation of salvation for the

41. Cf. Jn. 1.12, 1Jn. 3.1, Rom. 5.5

sake of the poor and needy, the oppressed and marginalised. Yeshua' became the new Moses and the leader of the new Exodus through his ministry and particularly through his death.⁴² Those who along with Yeshua' lead an obedient life to the inner voice of the *Paramatma*, would be the agents of salvation especially when they become identified with the sufferings of the fallen humanity. It is through this act of continuous liberation Yeshua' *Sanathana* continues to be the living dynamic reality among the people of this land.

During the last supper Guru Yeshua' uttered, 'Do this in remembrance of me.'⁴³ The root word in Aramaic, the mother-tongue of Yeshua' for 'Remembrance' actually means an ever present experience of the Guru in the midst of his disciples whenever they share Eucharistic meal. The elements of the sacred meal stand for the redemption of the created order. A life of sharing the material goods with Yeshua' in fellowship with others underlines the *sanathanathua* of Yeshua' with us. In the Eucharistic meal all believers join together in communion, the rich and the poor, the weak and the strong, the hopeful and the hopeless looking forward to the consummation of the rule of God on earth.

To sum up: We may say that Yeshua' the *Abishikta* of God is to be understood as an Asian who through his absolute obedience to God has been acknowledged by the believers as one who has revealed the saving act of God through his word and deed. Because of his faithfulness and commitment to God his personality is fully human and fully divine. Since he continued the salvific act of God for the sake of the poor and the weak, the oppressed and the slaves, we may see in him the salvific verb dynamically revealed in the existential realm. The *sanathanathua* of Yeshua' can be seen where liberative act of God takes place. Those who stand in need of total liberation may address him Yeshua' *Sanathana*, the *Abishiktha*. Our *Nithya Dharma* is to realise and absorb the saving *sanathanathua* for ourselves and for others so that we may become self-ought-to-be, the cosmos-ought-to-be in and through the process of becoming the children of God.⁴⁴

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Vatican II: a Council in Quest of a Theology

Dominic Veliyath

Vatican II underscores ecclesial identity at different levels in terms of relatedness. It is a council in search of a theology, and what were dialectical tensions before it assumed after it the contours of creative polarities.

Anyone browsing through the so-called avant-garde theological literature of the period preceding Vatican II cannot but be struck by the conservatism of even the most progressive thought of the time. Vatican II apparently covered more ground than expected and consequently left many of those goals far behind. Paradoxically, even disillusionment with the Council's results has been in part due to the appetite which has been whetted by the event of the Council.

Vatican II can, in a sense, be termed a 'happening' with two sides to it. Underpinning it is a biographical dimension. Paul Knitter justly remarks that all theology is rooted in biography, since the questions and the answers articulated in any theological vision are expressive of the struggles of the particular theologian(s) to arrive at a deeper integrity and commitment to their Christian faith.¹ Only subsequently is there the strictly theological dimension, viz., the articulation of a reflection on the faith. Theology is a reflection, a critical attitude. Theology follows it is the second step.²

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1. cf. Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian towards the World Religions*, (London, 1985, Xi)
 2. cf. G. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, (translated and edited by Sr. caridad Inda and John Eagleson, New York: 1973, p.11

Vatican II, a Theological Watershed

The teaching of Vatican II is symbolic of an authoritative Christian understanding of religious existence in a changing world. The Conciliar documents cannot be considered a corpus of purely doctrinal teaching, nor can they be reduced to a set of practical directives. They are, instead, the product of a spiritual process; and as such, it would be unfair to make an assessment solely from the viewpoint of so-called “progressive” or “conservative” theologies. They touch on the different facets of Christian self-understanding with the Church as their focal point.

Among the elements which were responsible for this process was the shift of perspective which was taking place in much of theological reflection round the world³:

- New questions were being asked for which there were no ready traditional answers;
- Inadequate old answers were being urged upon cultures and regions with new questions;
- the reality of new questions and old answers pointed to a concern that recurred in ecclesial communities round the world : a new awareness of ecclesial identity was emerging which was not envisaged by much of traditional theological reflection.

Different groups participating in Vatican II contributed to this new ecclesial awareness:

- The Bishops of Europe in close contact with the separated brothers and sisters;
- The Bishops of Latin America with their sensitivity to issues of injustice and oppression;
- The Bishops of Asia and Africa, living as they did, in a multi-religious context.

-Furthermore, the Neo-Scholastic paradigm which had dominated in the West for the past several centuries, lost its sway as the only apt

3. See in this regard R.Schreier, *Constructing Local Theologies*, (London 1988), 1-4.

philosophical tool to articulate the Church's self-understanding; other options were also considered as viable.⁴

A Paradigm Shift in Ecclesiological Understanding

The full novelty and impact of Vatican II can be gauged only when situated in the light of what can be called the mainline ecclesiological stance which characterized the Church in the Pre-Conciliar era. The Tridentine anti-Reformist stress which had characterized ecclesiology in all its ramifications is eliminated. There is a return to authentic Christian origins with a stress on the community dimension of the different aspects of Christian life. There is an openness to the world and history. In some instances which were strongly debated, the Council has used bridge-formulas leaving the text open.

The Council is the affirmation of what Ratzinger called a "horizontal Catholicity". The Church not only represents a "vertical unity" which joins all to the centre, but also a horizontal bond among Catholics. The Council restored a fruitful interaction between periphery and centre, between multiplicity of the forms of Catholic life and the unity which the Roman primacy is called to safeguard.

The Conciliar documents touch on different facets of Christian self-understanding with the Church as their focal point. To underscore the novelty of the Conciliar insights, the salient points of the relevant documents can be situated around three focal points viz.,

(A) **The Church in Herself**: The reality of the Church: The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church (*Lumen Gentium*); Her worship: (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*); her members-the bishops: (*Christus Dominus*); the Religious (*Optatam Totius*); the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*).

(B) **The Church in Her Relationships**: To Christians (*Unitatis Redintegratio*); to the followers of Other Religions (*Nostra Aetate*); to persons (*Dignitatis Humanae*).

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4. It is interesting to note that of the theological luminaries who participated as experts in Vatican II, such as Hannibal Bugnini CM, Henri de Lubac SJ, Bishop Helder Pessoa Camara, Karl Rahner etc. quite a few of them, while having initiated their academic career within the parameters of the Neo-Scholastic paradigm, in course of time seemed to have "outgrown" it and left it behind.

(C) The Church and the World: (*Gaudium to Spes*)

It may be said that Vatican II underscores ecclesial identity at different levels in terms of *relatedness*: within the Catholic community itself, to other Churches and ecclesial communities, to other religions, and finally to the world at large.

From Dialectical Tensions to Creative Polarities

Since the documents of Vatican II are not the explicitation of one particular philosophico-theological paradigm, but rather the diversified community faith-response to new pastoral *kairoi*, Vatican II, can, in a sense, be called a Council in quest of a theology. Interestingly, some of what were once considered dialectical tensions in the pre-Conciliar paradigm have begun to assume the contours of creative polarities.

Culling some of the underpinning orientations which, so to say, constitute the warp and woof of these documents of Vatican II, it becomes clear that there is a paradigm shift in ecclesiological understanding:

- From an *ideological* perspective to a *mysteric* view of the Church.
- From an *undue divinization* of the visible Church to its *sacramentalization*.
- From a *total identification of the Mystery of the Church with the visible Church* to *assigning the visible Church a special relationship to the Mystery of the Church*; thereby allowing for the possibility of *ecclesial elements outside the visible Church*.
- From an *absolutistic* (isolationist) understanding of the Church to a *relational* view of the Church.
- From an emphasis which was *clericalist, juridicist* and *triumphalist* to an ecclesial stress on communion, sacramentality and ministeriality.
- From *Either /Or* to *Both/And*.

In many sectors, Vatican II seemed to signal the end of the *either/or* era brought about by the realization that, given the mysteric and relational view of the Church, descriptions more often than not cannot be given in the form of categorical statements which express a choice between two alternatives, but must be expressed in the form of a "*both this and that*".

- Towards the Acceptance of Aggiornamento as an On-going Process. The *aggiornamento* initiated by Vatican II did not merely involve the *acceptance of changes* symbolised in the transition from one static model of ecclesial life to another, but a real education for the *acceptance of change as a normal phenomenon of the Church's life*.

Concluding Observations

The spirit that moved Vatican II clearly transcended the recorded results, so that the achievements of the post-Conciliar period cannot be narrowed down to the letter of the Council documents. In the words of Pope Paul VI: "Henceforth *aggiornamento* will mean to us enlightened penetration into the spirit of the Council and then faithful application of the directives so happily and firmly outlined by the Council. Both aspects have to be kept in mind, "the spirit" and the "directives".

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The Meaning and Scope of Religious Pluralism

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There is a rich plurality of religions owing to the incomprehensibility of the divine Mystery, the fragmentary character of human perception and the cultural conditioning of religious symbols. But they all emerge from the experience of being grasped by the one divine Spirit.

Reality is pluralistic. There is an infinite variety in the universe. No two leaves of a tree have the same structure; no two human persons are the same. Languages differ from one another; cultures evolve with a rich variety. All that grows unfolds with an infinite variety. Plurality is the very texture of reality. Growth takes place only where there is scope for plurality, and plurality shines forth only where there is growth. What grows is in a continuous process of transformation. Every living cell is constantly being regenerated and consequently every organism evolves on the colourful landscape of pluralism.

This can be said of religions too. Right from the beginning humanity experiences a rich plurality of religions. This is due to the manifoldness of the divine revelation and of its human pursuit in different cultures. "Religions are many and varied and they reflect the desire of men and women down the ages to enter into a relationship with the Absolute Being."¹ The phenomenon of religious pluralism is not just a matter of the historical past, but a reality of the living present. Even today new forms of religiosity evolve within the traditional religions and outside of them as well. The

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1. Pope John Paul II at Assisi, 27. October 1986

spiritual sensitivity of human persons responds to the demands of the Spirit in diverse ways. One cannot set a priori limits to the range and scope of the movement of the divine Spirit. One does not know where the Spirit blows, 'where it comes from or where it goes'². Plurality of religions is an integral element of the encounter between the human persons and the Divine.

There are three basic factors which account for plurality of religions: (i) the incomprehensibility of the mystery of the Divine, (ii) the fragmentary character of human perception, and (iii) the cultural conditioning of religious symbols.

Spirituality and Religion

Before pursuing these three factors it may be good to reflect on the distinction between spirituality and religion. Spirituality is the experience of being grasped by the divine Spirit, the Absolute, the Ultimate; religion is the culturally conditioned expression of this spiritual experience. Spirituality is the depth-dimension of religion, and religion is the unfolding format of spirituality. Spirituality refers to the core experience of a person or of a community, while religion is the articulation of that through the media of symbols. Spirituality and religion are dialectically interrelated like experience and expression, thought and language, content and form, *enstasis* and *ekstasis*, *bhava* and *rupa*. Spirituality subsists in religion, and religion exists out of spirituality. These are interrelated like the hidden root of a tree unfolding itself through the manifold branches.

Spirituality evolves into religion through the mediation of symbols, which are conditioned by the factors of time and space, history and culture. However spirituality always eludes symbolic expression for there is something numinous about it. The depth dimension of spiritual experience cannot be exhaustively expressed by particular symbols. Consequently there is scope for a rich variety of symbolic expressions in the process of spirituality getting articulated in religions. The creative dialectics between spirituality and religion may be helpful to examine the three factors of religious pluralism:

The Divine Mystery

At the very source of religion there is the spiritual experience of being gripped by something Beyond, the Absolute, the Divine. Spirituality is

2. John, 3,8.

therefore the dimension of the self-transcendence of the human spirit. With the awakening of this dimension the human person senses with 'fear and fascination' the all-permeating and all-transcending mystery of the Holy that envelops being and life³. Spirituality is the awareness of the radically sacred dimension of reality. Deep within oneself and at the core of the entire reality one senses the Divine. This contemplative awareness is basically the awareness of the mystery of the Divine. The human person is overwhelmed by the incomprehensibility of the Divine, the abysmal depth of the ultimate reality. There words merge into silence, all forms vanish and the mind returns.⁴ Then the truly spiritual person will not dare to name this mystery, for it eludes all names and forms. The divine commandment, 'thou shalt not make an image of God' has validity in all spiritual pursuits.⁵ In reality the Divine is the Ever Beyond: the *Brahman* (Upanishads), the Effulgent Darkness (Dyonisius the Areopagite), the God beyond God (Meister Eckhart), *Deus semper major*! "God lives in unapproachable light."⁶

Sensitivity to this dimension of divine mystery is the core of genuine spirituality. Hence the spiritual dynamics will constantly challenge religious expressions and move them towards the ever widening horizons of the divine presence. Spirituality gives an anchoring to religion and at the same time it pushes forth religion when the latter tends to get settled. Spirituality gives rootedness to religion as well as dynamism for growth. The divine Spirit shines through religious symbols and explodes them when they become opaque. The Spirit that alone reaches the depth of God cannot be exhaustively explored through particular religious symbols. Every religious symbol is relational: it has to be understood in relation to the Absolute, which always transcends it by being immanent in it. The religious symbols can reveal the divine presence only by concealing it. The reality of the Divine always remains hidden behind religious symbols.

Since the Divine is absolute mystery the divine plan of salvation too is

3. Cfr. Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige*, Beck, Muechen, 1971, 14, 42

4. Cfr. Taittiriya Upanishad, 2,4. "There the eye goes not, speech goes not, nor the mind; we know not; we understand not how one can teach this." Kena Upanishad, 1,3.

5. Exodus, 10,4.

6. I. Timothy, 6,16.

a mystery. In the spiritual evolution of humanity there have been moments when this hidden plan has been revealed in fragmentary ways. However no particular revelation can exhaustively unfold the divine plan for the former is conditioned by time and space, historical and social factors. The finite cannot fully grasp the Infinite, nor can it fully reveal the Infinite. 'Whatever is received, is received, according to the mode of the receiver'. The divine plan of salvation is revealed fragmentarily in a variety of ways according to human receptivity, and progressively, for it promotes the ongoing dialogue between God and humanity. Revelatory experiences could therefore be taken as dense moments (*kairoi*) of the salvific dialogue that God maintains with humanity at large. Such experiences registered and communicated in diverse religions may look mutually exclusive; however a mystical perspective could gradually discover the dialectical unity of God's universal plan of salvation. Such a mystical perception would always be sensitive to the incomprehensibility of the divine mystery and alert to the Spirit that 'blows where it wills'. Here one listens to the Spirit that speaks the Word in the sacred space within the heart of each human person and at the core of each religious culture. 'Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the community'⁷.

Human Perception

Listening to the divine Word, alertness to the divine Spirit is the basic dynamics of genuine spirituality. However this sensitivity is conditioned by the limiting factors of personal and communal psyche, and of the social and historical matrix. Perception of truth is always a relative process: 'the knowing person is part of the knowing process.'⁸ Hence his or her perception of truth is conditioned by factors which are intrinsic to the person or the culture. In so far as the subjective participation in the objective truth is always limited, there is no absolute perception of truth as such. Can then the truth perception of person or community be an unconditional guarantee or nonchallengeable norm for the understanding of truth for all others? Unlike the classicist elitistic pursuit of truth the historical perspective

7. Revelation, 2, 29.

8. Raimundo Panikkar, "A Universal theory or a Cosmic Confidence", in Swidler, L (ed), *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, Orbis, New York, 1988, 125-131

upholds the evolutionary character of truth perception and consequently the validity of pluralism in perceptions.⁹

The same principle can be applied to religion. The religious psyche, personal or communal, responds to the presence of the divine Spirit from within its limitations.¹⁰ The Spirit pours itself out into the mould of the human heart, which is always limited. The divine Word became flesh, which is the reality of human limitation and suffering.¹¹ When God chooses and makes his own a particular people they become the limited mediators of his self-revelation. When the divine Light shines through an enlightened sage it is a fragmentary theophany. Such experiences and expressions of being gripped and transformed by the Divine give rise to concrete religions, none of which can absolutise itself in the flux of history. To absolutise a particular religion is to cut it off from the evolutionary matrix of the universal process of God's revelatory dialogue with humanity. Believers of diverse religions are therefore like copilgrims who 'walk with others on a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another towards the goal which God sets for us'¹².

Not only in perception, but in communication too are religions relative. Authentic communication of truth is possible only where hearts meet.¹³ It is in love that truth shines forth and reaches out to the other. Where there is love, the totality of the other is acknowledged and respected. Only within such a process of fellowship can truth unfold itself and transform both the partners of communication. Love probes the depth of truth, the divine depth

9. "Only belatedly has the Church come to acknowledge that the world of the classicist no longer exists and that the only world in which it can function is the modern world (of historical culture)" Bernard Lonergan, *Belief: Today's Issue*, in Second Collection, Westminster, Philadelphia, 1974, 94, Cfr. Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name*, SCM, London, 1985, 1985, 31-32.

10. ".....quod homo sciat se Deum nescire." (that one may know that he does not know God) Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia*, 7.5. ad 14

11. Cfr. Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, Vol. I, Crossroad, New York, 1990, 265-273.

12. Pope John Paul II, at Assisi, 27. October., 1986

13. "Agreement means convergence of hearts, not just coalescence of minds." Raimundo Panikkar, *op. cit.*, 142.

of reality. In so far as love relationship is something personal and intimate, the communication of religious truth does take pluralistic forms. Every human person is ultimately a mystery and an expression of the mystery of the Divine. Hence in interpersonal communication of spiritual experience we are constantly encountering the human reality of mystery. The sacred and mysterious space in which I and thou are bound together by the divine Spirit is the locus of God's self-manifestation. Love is the primary language of revelation. In this sense community becomes the place where God's saving work is powerfully felt in transforming persons and structures. There is therefore infinite scope for the ways in which the Spirit reveals itself and human persons respond to this revelation. Hence the plurality of religions. Every religion is the communication of the divine truth in love.

Mediation of Symbols

Symbol is the medium between divine revelation and human perception. The God who speaks and the human person who listens, meet in symbols. God's reaching out to the human reality and the human response to the salvific presence merge in symbols. Thus symbols have a unifying power. Symbol is that which integrates, assembles (*syn-ballein*). "Symbols identify, assimilate and unify diverse levels and realities that are to all appearances incompatible."¹⁴ Religious symbols articulate the longing of the finite for the Infinite and unfolds the love of the Infinite for the finite. They bring out the potential infinity of the finite and open infinite horizons for the creativity of human persons. All that we humans can perceive in relation to the Divine is of a symbolic nature. Our language about God is intrinsically symbolic.

However, as St. Augustine says, religious symbols conceal the divine mystery more than they reveal it. No particular symbol can exhaustively express the incomprehensible divine mystery. It is this provisional character of religious symbol that keeps it alive in transparency. A religious symbol is essentially a relational reality: in relation to the divine mystery that it symbolizes and also in relation to the socio-cultural context from

14. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1958, 455.

which it emerges. Once this relationality is overlooked and symbol is made absolute it becomes opaque, unable to point to the divine depth of reality.

Since symbols are essentially relational they are pluriformic. There is an infinite variety of symbolic mediation of the encounter between God and human persons. Hence religious pluralism belongs to ontic structure of reality and to the epistemological process of truth perception. In this sense plurality of religions could be seen as an integral element of God's universal plan of salvation.¹⁵ Religious pluralism is the horizon of the history of salvation.

Meaning of Dialogue

If religious pluralism is a theological reality it could be asked: are believers of various religions destined to tread lonely paths in the pursuit of the Divine? What is the scope of a creative interaction of religious symbols?

The distinction made at the outset between spirituality and religion may be recalled here. Religions are symbolic expressions of spirituality, which denotes the experience of being gripped by the divine Spirit. The deeper one probes into this complex world of symbols the more clearly one could take note of the convergent lines of spirituality. All religions ultimately emerge from the experience of being grasped by the one divine Spirit. "There is only one divine plan for every human being who comes into this world. The differences are a less important element when compared with the unity which is radical, fundamental and decisive."¹⁶ Openness to these converging lines at the depth level is the dynamics of interreligious dialogue. At this level one could perceive a two fold movement of the Spirit: the mystical and the prophetic.¹⁷

The sensitivity to the incomprehensibility of the divine mystery is the constitutive dimension of mystical experience. Hence a mystic draws life from contemplative silence before the abysmal mystery of the Divine, and

15. Cfr. Stanley J. Samartha, *One Christ-Many Religions*, Orbis, New York, 1991, 5-9.

16. Pope John Paul II, at Rome, 22. December 1986

17. Cfr. Sebastian Painadath SJ, *Spiritual Dynamics of Dialogue*, Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection, 1996, 819-824

demands that all religious symbols must be constantly relativised in relation to the Beyond. This critique of the mystic can be found at the core of all religions and it is a channel through which the divine Spirit constantly transforms religious symbols. Sensitivity to the demands of God's justice is the mainspring of prophetic dynamism. A prophet listens with alertness to the word of God spoken into the existential situations of life and demands that all religious symbols and structures must be radically relativised in terms of the promotion of justice and peace, love and harmony. The critique of the prophet too can be found at the core of all religions and it is the second channel through which the divine Spirit transforms religious symbols. A religion that is not alert to the challenge of the mystic and the critique of the prophet cannot any more be a *religio*, for it does not unite human life with creativity of the divine Spirit. Ultimately every mystic is a prophet and every prophet a mystic. An unconditional alertness to the divine Spirit is the demand of both. The spiritual liberative undercurrents of any genuine religion are manifest through them. Discovery of these undercurrents is the motivation for interreligious dialogue. By opening oneself to the mystico-prophetic streams of the religion of the other one explores the deeper movements in one's own religious psyche and discovers the grace and demand (*datum et debitum*) of the divine Spirit deep within oneself, personally and collectively. In fact it is the authentic way of responding to the dialogue that is incessantly taking place at the heart of every human person and at the core of every religion. "Interreligious dialogue at its depth level is always a dialogue of salvation, because it seeks to discover, clarify and understand better the signs of the agelong dialogue which God maintains with humanity."¹⁸

Hence a creative interreligious dialogue cannot be restricted to the surface level of religious practices and doctrines; it must evolve at the deeper level of spirituality that finds expression through mystical insights and prophetic movements. The deeper we explore with mystics and prophets into the creative dimensions of spirituality, the closer we come to believers of other religions and realize thereby that we are all like co-pilgrims in pursuit of the Divine. Plurality of religions will then be understood as a blessing and not at all a block on our way towards the

18. Pope John Paul II, at Rome, 13. November 1992.

Divine. In an honest dialogical process the individuality of each believer and the specificity of each religion is acknowledged, respected and promoted in the wider horizon of the universal process of salvation. Ultimately interreligious dialogue is not a human enterprise, but participation in the divine work of dialogue. It is a sort of sacramental experience: "By dialogue we let God be present in our midst, for as we open ourselves to one another we open ourselves to God."¹⁹

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19. Pope John Paul II, at Madras, 5. February 1986.

Theology of the Laity in the Ecclesiology of Vatican II

Kuncheria Pathil

Vatican II rediscovered the Church as the People of God, which idea belonged to the original vision of the N.T. The call to exercise leadership in the Church was the call to serve the community. Vatican II made a shift from institution to mystery, from the hierarchy to the people, from monarchical papacy to collegiality and from the universal to the local.

The Church of the New Testament was a community of brothers and sisters where there was no distinction of hierarchy, clergy or laity. As the Church became more and more institutionalized, clericalism emerged and the lay faithful in the Church were considered second rate members, and their role was reduced to a merely passive one. Today with the teachings of Vatican II, and the rediscovery of the Church as the People of God, the laity begin to take their rightful place in the Church and in its mission. They have come of age and there seems to be a sudden awakening which is manifested in the several movements, organizations and publications by the laity. This phenomenon is a sign of hope for the Church in the third millennium.

Second Vatican Council documents, especially the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, and the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity are a landmark in the theology of the laity and their role in the mission of the Church. It was for the first time that an Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church pointed out and theologically explained that the laity has a specific mission in the Church. Along with

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the Bishops, Priests, and Religious, the laity have co-responsibility in the Church and in its mission to the world. The new code of canons both Latin (1983) and Oriental (1990) tried to spell out the role of the laity in the Church in a more positive way. In spite of these new legislations, the role of the laity in the decision-making bodies of the Church still remains to be a crucial question.

The terms laity, layman, lay etc., derive from the greek word *laos* which meant the people distinguished from the leaders, officers and rulers. But in the Old Testament the word *laos* meant the "people of Israel" referring to their special and privileged place as the "chosen people", "the People of God". In the New Testament *laos* was applied for the Christian community to show that they are "the new People of God" who are specially chosen and consecrated. "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people".¹ Gradually the word laity lost its biblical meaning and was used in its original secular meaning for the ordinary members of the Church distinguished from the clergy and the religious. Moreover, in the course of time it acquired a pejorative meaning, such as, ignorant, incompetent, ordinary etc.

Historical Perspective

Any discussion on the role of the laity in the Church has to be situated in the context of the whole ecclesiology. Ecclesiology is the articulation of the self-understanding of the Church. But this self-understanding of the Church is historically and culturally conditioned. Namely, the mystery of the Church takes concrete shape in history in the particular socio-cultural, political and religious context. Hence the mystery and reality of the Church shall not be identified with the concrete forms and structures of the Church where changes are not only possible but also essentially required. Christianity, as it was born in the family of Judaism, naturally understood itself as an offshoot of Judaism, and appropriated much of the Hebrew cultural and religious traditions. The church understood itself as the new "People of God" (*laos*), the new and true Israel, and the people of the "New Covenant". Naturally the jewish Christians emphasized Church's continuity with Israel and followed many of the jewish prayers, rituals and traditions; they continued to attend the temple and the synagogues and even

I. Pet. 2: 9-10.

practiced the law of circumcision. But when Christianity crossed the borders of the Hebrew world and met other peoples and cultures, like Greeks, Romans and the Germanic tribes, it began to dissociate itself from Judaism and to understand itself in new ways and categories. Sometimes the new ways in understanding the Church and its practical functioning led to conflicts and tensions and subsequent divisions in the Church.

When Hellenists and Gentiles began to accept Jesus and his Gospel and joined the Church, naturally such Christian groups wanted to dissociate themselves from Judaism, its traditions and practices, and emphasized their discontinuity with Israel. The controversy over circumcision, the Council of Jerusalem, and the persecution of Stephen and other leaders of the Hellenistic Christians could be seen as a result of the tension and confrontation between Jewish Christians and Hellenistic / Gentile Christians. The decision of the Jerusalem Council against insisting circumcision for Gentile Christians was a historic one because it allowed a healthy pluralism in the Church that there could be different types of Churches marked by a rich diversity in lifestyle, customs, worship, discipline, pattern of ministry, administration and organization, all conditioned by the socio-cultural, political and religious context of the people.²

Early Christianity had no central administration common for all the Churches, although they were fully aware of their unity in faith and communion with each other. Each local/regional Church was autonomous and autocephalous within the fundamental unity of Christian faith, enshrined in the Apostolic tradition and the common scriptures. Whenever there arose common problems or conflicts among the Churches on matters of faith and morals, the leaders of the various Churches met together in synods and councils and solved the problems and took important common decisions. The one Church was a communion of different Churches.

The early Jewish Churches, naturally, adopted the Jewish socio-cultural and religious patterns of organization and administration in the ministerial patterns of the Church. The system of Sanhedrin or the Council of Elders supervised the life and work of the community. On the other hand, the Hellenistic and Gentile Churches under the leadership of Paul and others followed a charismatic system of administration. Those who manifested charisms were accepted to be the leaders and ministers. *Episcopos* was a

2. Acts, Chapter 15.

Greek officer and the present episcopal system might have emerged from the Greek milieu. With the death of the Apostles and the first generation of leaders, probably, the overall leadership of the community was entrusted to *Episcopoi* who were gradually recognized as the authoritative successors of the Apostles. But they were not monarchical Bishops; they administered matters of the community with the consent of the council of elders or presbyters. The Deacons were entrusted with the administration of the temporal matters, and gradually they also began to assist at the liturgical services. Thus we see that the present system of the threefold ministry of Bishops, Priests and Deacons in the Church is the outcome of a gradual development in the Church due to a fusion between the Jewish and Greek systems. This pattern of threefold ministry was later on accepted by all the churches and it became normative as the only valid pattern until the Protestant Reformation.

The conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine to Christianity and the subsequent identification between Church and State was perhaps the most influential factor in the development of ecclesiology. Christianity thus became the official religion of the whole empire. Other religious cults were prohibited, and by political force and persuasion the entire people were converted to Christianity. Political power was also used to suppress various heresies and schisms in the Church. Conformity and uniformity in dogmas, doctrines and teachings were insisted upon by the Ecumenical Councils of the 4th and 5th centuries which were convened by the emperors with the tragic consequence of excommunication of some of the Churches. Under the influence of the political and imperial model the Church too gradually developed a monarchical system which was quite contrary to the New Testament vision of the Church and its authority which was meant to serve and not to dominate.

By the 4th and 5th centuries the Metropolitan sees of Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, Jerusalem and Constantinople began to exercise greater authority over larger territories, and by the 6th century they were known as the five Patriarchates, considered as the five senses, five heads, or five columns of the Church.³ This system known as Pentarchy or rule of the five

3. Fathers like Maximus the Confessor and Theodore Studite were the great promoters of Pentarchy. See, Emmanuel Lanne, *Irenikon*, 34 (1961), pp. 296-321.

patriarchs played a dominant role in the administration of the universal Church until it was superseded by the universal jurisdiction of the papacy which fully emerged in the 12th century by the Gregorian Reform. It was this reform by Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) which theologically elaborated and practically implemented Papal Primacy or the Universal Jurisdiction of the Popes. Of course, there are indeed Biblical and theological foundations and historical reasons for the emergence of the Papacy and its universal authority which I do not want to elaborate now. In the system of Pentarchy all the five patriarchs had equal authority and status, although the Patriarch of Rome was recognized as the "first among the equals", which was more a primacy of honour than jurisdiction. The assertion of the universal jurisdiction of the Church of Rome practically destroyed the legitimate autonomy and identity of the other Churches, and the concept of the Catholic Church as a Communion of different Individual Churches fell into oblivion.⁴

My intention here is not to deal with the evolution of the structures and shape of the Church as such, but to point out that the mystery of the Church takes concrete shape in history in the particular socio-cultural, political and religious context. The theology of the laity and the role they play in the Church is naturally conditioned by the vagaries of the historical development of the Church. With this general ecclesiological perspective, I shall now speak about the role of the laity in the two contrasting ecclesiologies, Pre-Vatican and Post-Vatican II. The assumption is that there is a radical shift in the ecclesiology of Vatican II. Our division of ecclesiology into Pre-Vatican and Post-Vatican is indeed very broad. In the life and thinking of the Church no watertight compartmentalization or strict division is possible. Pre-Vatican trends in ecclesiology do still dominate in various quarters, and post-Vatican thinking could be traced in the earlier periods.

Role of the Laity in the Pyramidal Ecclesiology

The Pre-Vatican II ecclesiology is typically the Medieval ecclesiology which is often called the "Pyramidal Ecclesiology". Here the Church is envisaged and structured like a pyramid at the apex of which remains the Pope with the entire authority concentrated exclusively in him. His

4. See, Kuncheria Pathil, "Catholic Ecclesiology and the Challenges it faces today", *Jeevadhara*, July, 1989, pp. 282-306.

authority is full and absolute, and he delegates part of his authority to those who are at the lower rungs of the pyramid, namely to the Bishops. And the Bishops delegate part of their authority to those who are below them, namely, to priests. The Deacons are at still lower rungs with lesser authority. At the bottom of the ecclesial pyramid are the laity, who have no authority or positive role in the Church. They just passively receive everything from above and they have no active role or involvement in the mission of the Church.

This pyramidal ecclesiology can be further highlighted by explaining its historical, socio-cultural, political, philosophical and theological background. The centralization of the Church and formation of its pyramidal structures were the result of a gradual development which began in the 4th century and completed in the 12th and 13th centuries. The identification of the Church and State, the imperial model of political administration, the felt need of eradicating numerous heresies and schisms by an all powerful and central authority, the task of the common mission of the Church in the new continents, all these factors led to a gradual centralization of the Church. As already mentioned above, it was the Gregorian Reform of the 11th century which asserted the power of the Papacy and implemented the universal jurisdiction of the Popes. The first codification of the canon law by Gratian in the 12th century legally legitimized and consolidated the universal jurisdiction of the Popes. The political and socio-cultural background for this ecclesial development was the Roman imperial rule and the feudalistic social patterns. The whole authority in the society was vested in the emperor, and under him were the kings, princes, and vassals to whom some power and authority was delegated by the emperor. At the bottom of the social pyramid were the ordinary people who by the sweat of their brow maintained the whole society and supported its hierarchical structure by perfect obedience. The Church was recognized as the model of a "perfect society".

The philosophical background of the pyramidal ecclesiology was the prevalent philosophical systems of the time, namely, the Platonic and Neo-Platonic thinking. In these systems the Absolute which is the pure Act has no immediate contact with the created world. Creation is through intermediary sub-gods by way of emanations which means the existence of a hierarchy of beings. As creation is through intermediaries, so is salvation through mediation of the higher beings. Therefore, it is quite natural that

in the ecclesial pyramid there has to be a hierarchy of higher and lower authorities. The salvation of the laity is through the priests whose authority is from the Bishops and they in turn depend on the Pope for their own authority.

The Scholastic theologies of the 12th and 13th centuries were built on these philosophical foundations. Albert the Great, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas were the theoreticians of Papal Primacy and of the pyramidal ecclesiology. According to them Christ gave authority to one man in the Church, to Peter, and through Peter the other Apostles received authority. Pope is the successor of Peter in the Church. Therefore, he has supreme, full, absolute authority in an exclusive way. It is through the Pope that the Bishops get authority in the Church, and the authority of the Bishops is only partial and delegated. The Pope is the Vicar of Christ, the visible Christ in the world, and he has authority also over secular powers. The Scholastics quoted several scriptural texts for the absolute authority of the Popes and that of the Church.⁵

In this pyramidal ecclesiology originated in the medieval imperial and feudalistic society, there were two separate classes of people in the Church, the clergy and the laity, the rulers and the ruled, those who wielded authority and those who were subject to authority. Thus the laity who were 99% of the members of the Church were simply reduced to mere spectators in the Church without having any positive role or involvement in the mission of the Church. Their role in the Church was simply to obey, pray and make financial contributions. They were excluded from all the decisionmaking bodies of the Church. The Church and its mission exclusively belonged to the hierarchy and the clergy. It was the Second Vatican Council which ultimately put an end to this clericalism in the Church.

“People of God” Model Ecclesiology of Vatican II

Vatican II rediscovered the Church as the ‘People of God’ which belonged to the original vision enshrined in the New Testament. The Church at its origin was a People’s Movement, a People’s Church. It was the community of Jesus’ disciples, a community of brothers and sisters, a

5. For example: Mt. 16:18; Lk. 10:16; I Cor. 6:3; 2:15; I Pt. 2:9, etc. See, Y. Congar, *Power and Poverty in the Church*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1964, Pp. 61ff

community of the 'little ones' where all the members enjoyed perfect equality, fraternity and equal dignity and status. There were no rulers and the ruled, no superiors and inferiors. Although the different members had different charisms and corresponding functions in the community, that did not mean any superiority or inferiority in the Church. "The company of those who believed were of one heart and one soul."⁶ Although some people were called to exercise an overall leadership in the community, it only meant a call "to serve" the community. The final authority in the Church was entrusted to the whole community as clearly attested in the Gospel of Matthew.⁷ The Church in the New Testament was thus *ecclesia*, "the people who were called together", "the assembly or gathering of the people". They were called together "to be sent" to proclaim the "Good News" of the arrival of "the Kingdom of God". The Church was a community held together not by structures and institutions, but by the bond of faith and love, by "the teaching of the Apostles, fellowship, the breaking of the bread and prayer."⁸ Ministers of the early Christian communities, such as, presbyters and bishops, were elected with the participation of the laity and they were called to serve the community and build it up, and not to rule or dominate. Jesus repeatedly warned his disciples: "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise their authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, whoever would be first among you must be the slave of all. For the Son of Man also came not to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many."⁹

This New Testament model of the Church, as the People of God, Fellowship or Community of the People, or Communion model is rediscovered by Vatican II in the new context of our society. It is a long time

6 Acts 4:32.

7 Mt. 18:1-20: This passage is known as the Discourse on the Church or the Community Rule, and here we find the earliest ecclesiology of the New Testament. See, Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Church in the New Testament*, London: Burns and Oates, 1974, pp. 69-76. 149-157.

8 Acts. 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 5:2-15.

9 It is striking that this instruction of Jesus to his disciples for service is found six times in the four Gospels: Mt. 20:25-28; Mk. 10:45; Lk. 22:27; Jn. 13: 12-15 etc.

since the imperial, feudal, colonial and dictatorial socio-political systems became obsolete and in their place democratic, egalitarian and free societies emerged. It means that the Church too has to replace its outdated structures, patterns of administration and leadership with more relevant ones in tune with today's culture and ethos. Besides, the emergence of the newly independent nations in the 20th century and the new consciousness of their cultural and political identity demanded the legitimate autonomy of the different local and national Churches and called for more inculturation of the Churches. In addition to this, the emergence of the new pluralism, cultural, social, religious, ecclesial and theological, offered a new concept of "unity in plurality", and invited the nations, religions and churches to enter into a new fellowship and be committed to the Kingdom of God, rather than extending one's own territories.

The Ecclesiology of Vatican II made a radical shift from the medieval, pyramidal ecclesiology. I would like just to mention four specific aspects of this shift. It is a shift in emphasis.

(1) A Shift from Institution to Mystery

The Church is primarily a mystery, a spiritual reality, a sacramental event which assumes particular forms in history. It is basically the mystery of God's plan of salvation manifested in time, in history, in the particular ecclesial communities, institutions and structures. Hence the Church cannot be strictly defined, but only described by various imageries and concepts as done by the New Testament. But in the medieval ecclesiology the church was reduced to a perfect society and visible institution with clear-cut definitions, rules, structures and boundaries that the mystery aspect of the Church was lost to a great extent. The Council rectified this institutional overemphasis and highlighted the mystery dimension of the Church. The Church can never be reduced to its visible institutions, structures, rituals and dogmas. The mystery of the Church transcends all these external manifestations and expressions to such an extent that it can exist even outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church. This new vision has prompted the Council to accept the ecclesial reality of the other Churches. Moreover, the mystery of the Church and the mystery of the Kingdom of God are intimately related. But the Church and the Kingdom cannot be totally identified. The Church is only a humble servant, herald and sacrament of the Kingdom. Thus the shift from institution to mystery

is also a call for a Kingdom- - oriented ecclesiology which is open and not triumphalistic.

(2) A Shift from Hierarchy to People

In the approved scheme of **Lumen Gentium** the chapter on the People of God came after the chapter on the Hierarchy. But during the discussions in the Council a strong suggestion was made to reverse this order and place the chapter on the People of God before the chapter on the Hierarchy. The fact that this suggestion was accepted by the council is a clear indication of a shift from hierarchy to the people. The Church is primarily the People of God, and the functions of the hierarchy have to be situated within the whole People of God. The members of the hierarchy are first and foremost members of the People of God, and as members of the People of God the Hierarchy and the Laity have equal status and dignity. No charism or function shall extol anybody.

This rediscovery of the Church as the People of God has tremendous consequences for transforming the whole Church and its mission. The laity began to take their rightful place in the Church. They began to realize that theirs is the Church, or rather that they are the Church. With the inspiration of the Council, people's Churches and Basic Christian Communities began to emerge as new models of being the Church.

(3) A Shift from Monarchical Papacy to Collegiality of Bishops

Another aspect of this radical change is the rediscovery of the synodal and conciliar structures and systems of the early Churches and a shift from the papal monarchical system. The earliest major controversy in the Church on the admission of the Gentiles and the question whether they had to be circumcised like the Jewish Christians was solved not from above by a decree or decision of Peter, but by common discussion and deliberation in a Council where all the Apostles and Elders of the different Churches took part. The meeting of Provincial synods and councils of the neighbouring Churches, whenever they faced common problems and issues, was a custom during the second and third centuries. The fourth and fifth centuries witnessed the great events of the Ecumenical Councils which met to deliberate on the Trinitarian and Christological controversies of the period. The Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 AD) stipulated that Provincial synods should be held twice a year, and thus in the East the synodal system

became a constitutive part of the functioning of the Church.¹⁰ As already mentioned above, it was the development of the centralization of the Church and the emergence of a monarchical Papacy which eliminated the synodal and conciliar structures of the early Churches.

In *Lumen Gentium*, chapter 3, the Council teaches that the College of Bishops has supreme, universal and immediate authority in the Church in teaching matters of faith and morals. But this authority of the College of Bishops does not contradict the authority of the Pope, as the Pope is within the College, and in fact, he is the head of the College. It means that the Pope and the bishops should function in the Church in close collaboration and communion as members of one body.

(4) A Shift from the Universal to the Local

In the pre-Vatican II period the emphasis was on the Universal Church and its unity and uniformity under the Papacy at the expense of the diversity of the Churches and their legitimate autonomy. Vatican II made a shift of emphasis to the local Churches, their rich diversity and legitimate autonomy. As successors of the Apostles the Bishops are not only coresponsible for all the Churches, but as heads of the local Churches they have their own authority in their respective Churches. The authority of the Bishops is derived not from the Pope but from the Apostles by the act of episcopal consecration by which they become successors of the Apostles. They are the principle of unity of the local Churches and no local Church can be *under any other local Church*. Every local Church is the concrete manifestation and embodiment of the Universal Church, and it is not merely a fraction or administrative unit of the universal Church. The Universal Church, in fact, exists in the local Churches; the local Church is the real Church in its original. The different local/individual Churches have their legitimate autonomy enjoying their own traditions, liturgies, disciplines, and their own theological and spiritual heritage. The unity among these local/individual Churches is their communion in the same faith and sacraments. Their unity is expressed in the communion of Churches and their Bishops, who are members of one College along with its head who is the Roman Pontiff. The Church becomes "Catholic" by this communion

10. J. Hajjar, "Synod in the Eastern Church", *Concilium*, 1 (1965), No. 8, pp. 30-34.

among the many Churches; separated from this communion no Church can claim to be catholic. The different Churches have equal dignity and equal responsibility for the whole Church. The one Church of Christ exists in the many Churches, and the emphasis today is on the many and the “unity in diversity”.

I have already mentioned that these are shifts in emphasis. The new emphasis on the aspects of the mystery, the people, collegiality and the local church does not mean a total denial of the aspects of institution, hierarchy, papacy, and universality which are also essential aspects of the Church.

Theology of the Laity in Vatican II

After having highlighted the shift in the ecclesiology of Vatican II, let me briefly deal with the role of the laity in it. The main documents dealing with this subject are the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, and the Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity.

(I) Members of One Community with Equal Status

According to Vatican II there are no two separate classes or groups of people in the Church such as, Clergy and Laity, but the Church is one community where all have perfect equality as brothers and sisters, and the same dignity as the members of the People of God. Different gifts or charisms or functions do not make members superior or inferior. All gifts are for the building up of the community. Hence any exercise of authority by the leadership over against the community’s mind and will is against the whole spirit of the Church. The authority in the Church must be exercised in a harmonious relationship with the whole community. Exercise of authority in the church shall be by *consensus*.

The Holy Spirit who resides in the whole community is the theological basis for the authority in the Church. According to the New Testament the last word of authority is entrusted to the whole community.¹¹ It is not a denial of the special role of the Apostles and their successors in the Church. They are first and foremost the spokespersons of the community, who speak authoritatively for the community and in the name of the community.

11. Mt. 18: 15-20

Of course, they have the special charism of the Spirit for discernment and leadership. This basic understanding of the community nature of the Church and its functioning must be the background for understanding the role of the laity in the Church. Clergy, religious and laity have to function in the Church as members of one and the same community. This is the main thrust of the whole chapter two of *Lumen Gentium* where the Church is presented as the People of God.

(2) A Priestly People

According to Vatican II the entire People of God is a priestly people (LG, nos. 10-11). The early Christian communities of the New Testament times did not have "priests" as such, but other functionaries such as, *episcopoi*, *presbyteroi*, and *diakonoi* (Bishops, Priests and Deacons). In the Christian community every member of the community was able to stand before God and address Him as "Abba", Father, without any mediator. Everybody was entitled to worship God directly (without "priests" or mediators), and actively participate in the celebration of the Word and the Sacraments, although some are specially called and ordained to lead the worship and the administration of the sacraments. This common priesthood of the whole People of God gives equal dignity to all the members of the Church. It was due to the gradual development of sacerdotalism, clericalism, and political and secular fashion of exercising authority in the Church the community nature and functioning of the Church suffered a set back and the Church became divided into two separate groups of clergy and laity, those who rule and those who are ruled.

(3) Prophetic Ministry of all Christians

According to Vatican II, the entire people of God is called to exercise a prophetic ministry.¹² The basis of this prophetic ministry is the gift of the Spirit to every Christian and to the Christian community where the Spirit resides in a very special way. The Council underlines the supernatural sense of faith (*sensus fidei* or *sensus fidelium*) of the whole Christian community which is the ultimate basis for the infallible nature of the Church in matters of faith: "The body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy One cannot err in matters of belief. Thanks to a

12. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12.

supernatural sense of the faith, which characterizes the people as a whole, it manifests this unerring quality when 'from the bishops down to the last members of the laity' (St. Augustine), it shows universal agreement in matters of faith and morals".¹³

Sensus Fidelium is the collective faith-consciousness of the believing community. It means that the believing community has a special kind of knowledge, springing from faith and embracing its fundamental features.¹⁴ It is the community's feeling or common sense or innate sense for the fundamentals of Christian faith and its authentic understanding. *Sensus Fidei* is the faith intuition or the faith feeling of the Christian community by which it "sees" the correspondence or non-correspondence between Christian faith and its formulation or expression in a particular context. It also "sees" whether an element of faith corresponds to the genius or uniqueness of the totality of Christian faith or Christian world vision.¹⁵ Naturally, its basis is the individual consciousness illumined by faith. But the individual faith-consciousness and the collective faith-consciousness are qualitatively different. The former may easily fall into error, whereas the latter is the criterion for the former. *Sensus Fidei* is the basis of *Consensus Fidelium* which may be said to be the general agreement among the faithful on matters of faith and its formulations.¹⁶

As already mentioned above, this consensus of the believing Christian community based on *sensus fidei*, inspired and guided continuously by the Spirit, is the basis for the infallible teaching authority of Church. The Papal Infallibility and that of the College of the Bishops or of the Ecumenical Councils shall not be separated from this *sensus fidei* of the community. The authority of the Pope or of the College of Bishops shall not be seen as exclusive channels of the working of the Spirit. Rather the

13. Ibid

14. Herbert Vorgrimler, "From *Sensus Fidei* to *Consensus Fidelium*", *Concilium*, No. 180 (4/1985), p.3

15. Zoltan Alszegehy, "The *Sensus Fidei* and the Development of Dogma", in *Vatican II: Assesment and Perspectives Twentyfive Years After*, Vol.I, edited by Rene Latourelle, N.Y: Paulist Press, 1988, pp. 148-152.

16. See, Kuncheria Pathil, "Magisterium and *Sensus Fidelium* in the Interpretation of Revelation", in *Emerging India and the Word of God*, edited by Paul Puthenagady, Bangalore: NBCLC, 1991, pp. 75-89.

teachings of the Magisterium is based on the *sensus fidei* of the entire Christian community. Hence the important question of the participation of the laity in the exercise of the magisterium and in the decision - making bodies of the church to which we shall come later.

(4) *Secular Quality of the Laity's Mission*

Second Vatican Council speaks about the mission of the laity in the world rather than in the Church. It emphasizes the "secular quality" of the mission of the laity.¹⁷ Mission of the laity is to transform the society and the world in accordance with the spirit of Jesus Christ and that of the Gospel. They have to work in the manner of leaven from within the world where they live and work. Their priestly mission consists in offering themselves, their own life and work, as a spiritual sacrifice and thus consecrating and sanctifying the world. The prophetic mission of the laity is to witness to Christ and his Gospel in the day-to-day socio-cultural life and family life by their living witness as well as by the spoken word. The *pastoral mission* of the laity means their involvement in the created world, as partners of God, in transforming this world into a better place where all people could live with justice, freedom and equality and thus in preparing the world to receive the seed of the Word of God. Thus by layapostolate the Council understands the laity's mission and ministry in the world and not their ministry or role within the Christian community and its structures. The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, in chapter three, speaks about the various fields of the apostolate of the laity, their work in families, among the youth, in the social fields, in national and international affairs etc.

(5) *Mutual Support of Laity and Clergy*

While explaining the role of the laity, the Council speaks about the relationship between the clergy and the laity. It is one of mutual support and mutual dependence, and it calls for the dialogue between the clergy and the laity. In the areas wherever the laity is competent, they should express their opinion freely and boldly, and the clergy should learn from the experience and expertise of the laity.

The Council underlines the presence of the different charisms in all the

17. *Lumen Gentium*, ch. 4; *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*; *Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 43-44.

members of the Church, and states that they are all meant for the building up of the Church, and it gives a warning both to the hierarchy and the laity. The hierarchy has indeed the competence to discern the genuineness of the charisms of the various members of the church. But they shall not in any way extinguish these charisms present in the members of the church, rather hold fast to everything good in them. The members of the Church, on the other hand, should have the docility and openness to be subjected to the authority of discernment on the part of hierarchy.¹⁸

(6) Canonical Legislations

The ecclesiology of Vatican II and the new theological understanding of the role of the laity in the Church were juridically formulated by the 1983 Latin Code and later by the Eastern Code of 1990. Equal dignity of all the baptized members of the Church demanded more participation of the laity in the mission and functioning of the Church, especially in the threefold office of the Church, of governing, teaching and sanctifying.

In the new codes many functions and offices previously exercised exclusively by the ordained ministers are granted to the laity, those functions for the exercise of which the power of sacred orders is not required. A few examples may be mentioned here: Lay faithful can take part in the various decision-making bodies of the Church though only with a consultative vote (CIC 228/2; CCEO 140-145). In Church Tribunals lay persons may be appointed as judges, advocates etc (CIC 1421/2; CCEO 1087/2). Similarly, lay persons who are competent may be appointed as diocesan financial administrators, chancellors etc (CIC 482, 494). Lay faithful may be asked to preach in Churches when it is necessary or advantageous (CIC 766; CCEO 610/40). Lay persons may even conduct the liturgy of the sacrament of marriage and thus act as the official witness of the Church with the necessary permission of the Bishop and the Holy See (CIC 1112).

Questions and Challenges

We have discussed very briefly the theology of the role of the laity in the Church and in its mission according to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. Let me conclude this short presentation with two questions or challenges.

18. *Lumen Gentium* no. 12.

(1) *Laity's Role in the Magisterium of the Church*

If the whole community is the deposit of faith and the abode of the Spirit, and has the gift of a supernatural sense of faith, what is its role, especially the role of the laity in the decision making bodies of the Church even when dealing with matters of faith and morals? In the early Churches decisions on matters of faith and morals were taken by the synods and councils at the regional, provincial and national levels. These synods and councils were participated by the local bishops, but not excluding members of lower clergy, religious and laity. Some of the earliest Ecumenical Councils were convened by the Roman Emperors, and in those councils some princes, abbots, monks and members of the laity played significant roles. In the early Churches we have many examples of lay persons who were eminent teachers, such as, Pantaenus, Origen, Tertullian and Justin. In fact the rapid spread of Christianity in the first three centuries was mainly due to the work of the itinerant preachers, teachers and missionaries who were mostly lay men and women. But gradually as institutionalism and clericalism emerged the idea prevailed that the right to teaching and preaching should be reserved to clergy, and thus the lay ministry virtually ceased. The regional and provincial synods were gradually suppressed due to the centralization of the Church and the presence of the lower clergy and of the laity was eliminated on account of the development of clericalism.

In the tradition of the St. Thomas Christians of India the role of the laity was very decisive in the local Church assemblies (*Palliyogam*) and in the national Church assembly (*Malankarayogam*). Local Church assembly or *Palliyogam* consisted of all the heads of the families and all the priests and deacons of that community. The eldest priest of the local community presided over this assembly, and all decisions pertaining to the community were taken by the whole assembly. The national Church assembly or the *Malankarayogam* was composed of the representatives of all the local Churches including both priests and the laity. But the laity had the majority in the assembly. The Malankara Metropolitan presided over the assembly and the Archdeacon of the Church had a decisive role to play. But this General Assembly had the highest authority in the Church. The Metropolitan and the Archdeacon were directly responsible to the assembly. This ancient administrative system of the St. Thomas Christians was suppressed during the Padroado and Propaganda rule, and today as the Syro-Malabar Church is restored to the Archiepiscopal status and its particular

laws are being codified, the Church assemblies should be restored with timely adaptations. Indeed, the Jacobite, the Orthodox and the Mar Thoma Churches of Kerala still continue this system of Church assemblies with minor changes.

The Anglican Church of England has a Church Parliament consisting of three separate Houses, House of Bishops, House of Clergy and House of the Laity. All major decisions concerning the Church have to be passed by all the three Houses separately. The United Churches in India, such as the Church of South India and the Church of North India, too have a Synodal structure. The highest authority of the Church is the Synod which consists of all the Bishops and representatives of the clergy and the laity. But the laity forms the majority of the Synod members.

In the light of the People of God ecclesiology and the practice of the early Churches and that of the other Churches, a serious re-thinking is needed on the exercise of the role of the laity in the decision-making bodies of the Church, at the local, regional, national and universal levels. The provisions given in the Latin and Oriental Codes have to be critically studied. New legislation may be needed to give adequate representation to the laity in the decision-making bodies of the Church, including Ecumenical Councils, Roman Synod and other synods of the Churches.

(2) *Laity's Role in the Administration of the Temporalities of the Church*

In the New Testament we read that the Apostles entrusted the administration of the temporalities of the Church to the Deacons and spared themselves entirely for the preaching of the Word of God. As clericalism emerged in the Church, the higher clergy began to dominate and control everything in the Church including the administration of the temporalities of the Church. Today time has come that the clergy had better leave the administration of the temporalities of the Church with the laity and spare themselves entirely for their priestly and prophetic ministry. In fact, the laity are more competent at the administration of the temporalities.

Let the laity take their rightful place in the Church as full and involved members. Only then will the church become *ecclesia*, the Assembly of the People.

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The Structures of the Emerging Church of The Third Millennium

Paul Puthanangady

The unity of the Church, the Body of Christ is more organic than organizational. Hence adjustments have to be made in its structures to give expression to the present ecumenical, inter-religious and multi-cultural context.

The approach of the third millennium is looked upon by people of all walks of life with a sense of expectation. This can be a sign of dissatisfaction with the present or it can be an expression of new hope. As far as the Church is concerned, the coming of the third millennium may be considered a *kairos*, that is, a renewed offer of salvation to a humanity that has to some extent become disoriented in the midst of changes that have radically altered the life-situations. There are many challenges that the Church has to face in order to make her life and mission meaningful to the world. In that process, being a historical reality, she has also to change her structures without in any way renouncing her basic identity in her relationship with Christ and to his mission. The re-discovery of the sacramental character of the church is very significant at this juncture because in this way she can remain faithful to her basic identity even as she subjects herself to the changing scenario of the world. "As the assumed nature, inseparably united to him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a somewhat similar way, does the social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ who vivifies it, in the building up of the body¹." From this

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it is clear that the Church which is the Mystery of Christ has to become sacramentalized in order to fulfill her mission in the world. "The Church has a visible social structure, which is a sign of its unity in Christ: as such it can be enriched, and it is being enriched by the evolution of social life—not as if something were missing in the constitution which Christ gave the Church, but in order to understand this constitution more deeply, express it better, and adapt it more successfully to our times²." When this happens, there will necessarily take place a change in the structures of the Church, as in fact it has taken place in the course of centuries. "So the Church, as a visible or empirical society, as the organized people of God, has in the course of its history passed through many institutional forms."³ During this period of history when changes in society are taking place rapidly and radically, it is inevitable that the Church too undergoes a change in her structures. This is necessary to maintain her authentic sacramentality.

1. Glimpses of Structural Changes in the Course of time

The Church appears as a visible community in the world in the course of the Eucharistic celebration which in the early church was not a mere cultic gathering, but a coming together of people united in love, expressed in the sharing of a meal, and experiencing the Risen Lord in their midst. The Church was an organism, centred around the Lord and expressed in the Eucharist. The structures of such a society were based on a principle of mutual relationship of love. However, soon the Eucharist was separated from the meal; as a consequence the community became more and more cultic and its organization was that of a cultic assembly in which there is a hierarchical set up. From here, the transition to a legal body or perfect society was very easy. The priest became the ruler of the community and the guardian of orthodoxy. The sacramentality was expressed not so much in terms of the visibilization of the Mystery as in terms of common doctrine and common structures of government. These latter were taken from a monolithic set up like that of the Greco-Roman world; as a consequence, one particular structure was absolutized to the extent that the Church could never think of manifesting her sacramentality through any other structures.

2 *Gaudium et Spes* n. 44.

3 *The New Dictionary of Theology* (ed. by Joseph A. Kommonchak and others, Bangalore 1993, p. 197

In general, we may say that the church in the first millennium, more or less, had a eucharistic structure, while in the second millennium she had a legal structure. What will be the characteristic of the Church structure in the third millennium?

2. The factors that can influence the structures of the Church in the emerging millennium

The Second Vatican Council has proposed a new way of being Church in the Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*. "All men are called to this catholic unity which prefigures and promotes universal peace. And in different ways to it belong, or are related: the Catholic faithful, others who believe in Christ and finally all mankind, called by God's grace to salvation."⁴ In addition to this the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* very clearly shows that the relationship of the Church to the world is an important factor in determining the identity of the Church. In the light of these Conciliar perspectives there are certain factors that must be taken into account in determining the structures of the Church.

a) *The multi-religious character of the world*

The conditions of the world after the Second Vatican Council opened the Christian Church to a greater awareness of the religious dimension of world civilizations⁵. This openness to other religions culminated at Vatican II in the publication of the document *Nostra Aetate*; which explicitly recognized the truth in the religions of the world. In fulfilling the mission of the Church these religions must be positively taken into account. The Church must be capable of entering into dialogue with them. The multi-religious character of society has to exert some influence in the life and mission of the Church. The formulation of her structures will necessarily be affected by this factor.

b) *The multi-cultural character of the world*

The division of the world into people of culture and no culture (barbarians) has long been rejected. The idea of civilization in terms of the

4. *Lumen Gentium* n. 13.

5. George M. Tavard, *The Church Community of Salvation*, Collegeville, 1992, p. 211

imposition of western culture on the peoples of the world is no more tenable. The multicultural reality of the world is accepted by the church in the fulfillment of her mission: "The Church is faithful to its traditions and at the same time conscious of its universal mission; it can then enter into communion with different forms of cultures, thereby enriching both itself and the cultures themselves"⁶. When this takes place, the structures of the Church will have to undergo a change because then authentic local churches will come into being with their proper structures.

c) *The communication revolution*

The enormous progress of technology in the field of communication has changed the style of life and pattern of thinking of peoples in a very radical manner. The Church, whose mission is to communicate the Good News to the world has to enter into the world of communication if she has to be relevant in the modern human society. Now, she cannot enter into this world as an advertiser, but as an agent of dialogue with humanity. This will call for a change in her approach to the ministry of the Word, specially to her evangelizing mission. She has to find structures that will facilitate the fulfillment of her mission in this context.

d) *Openness to the world*

The openness of the Church to the world is very vividly expressed by II Vatican Council in these words: "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ.... Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history"⁷. Since the structure of the Church is at the service of her mission, the solidarity that she has with the world will affect the formulation of her structure as well. The Church does not exist any more in the world as a mere agent of humanitarian activities, but as a sharer of the hopes and aspirations of humanity. She needs to revise her structures in order to make this presence effectively ministerial.

e) *Ecumenical diversity*

The ecumenical movement in the Church has made all Christian

6. *Gaudium et spes* n. 58

7. *Gaudium et Spes* n. 1

communities reflect on the responsibility that each of them has for fostering the unity of the Church of Christ. It is no more an effort to effect the return of the non-Catholic Christians to Catholic Church. It is an effort to live together and work together in communion of mind and heart for the coming of the kingdom of God. This calls for the conversion and aggiornamento of every ecclesial community. Each one of them needs to change its existing structures in order to effect this communion in life and mission.

3. Some indications for a structural change in our ecclesial existence

The change of structures in the Church is at the service of her mission towards humanity. The focal point of this mission is the building up of the kingdom of God. This kingdom is already present in the world in a variety of forms. What the Church has to do is to make it emerge, freed from all its ambiguities. The structures are the instruments that she uses in effecting this. We can point out some of the basic characteristics of these structures:

a) It must be capable of fostering dialogue

The Church proposes a new relationship with religions: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.....The church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also, their social life and culture"⁸. Dialogue must enter into the mission of the Church as an important dimension. Structures of the Church should facilitate this way of fulfilling her mission.

b) Inculturation, an indispensable aspect of the life and mission of the Church

The cultural diversity of which we spoke above has become a dynamic reality in the relationship among peoples. We can speak of the unity of the

8. *Nostra Aetate* no. 2.

world only in terms of a communion of diversity. The monolithic unity of the Roman culture which categorized all that was outside the Roman empire as barbaric is no more sustainable. Inculturation has become a basic requirement for the fulfillment of the mission of the Church. Her structures which are oriented to her mission, have, therefore, to be necessarily inculturated. "If the Church is to be in a position to offer all men the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, then it must implant itself among all these groups in the same way that Christ by his incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the humans among whom he lived⁹." The Church today has a marvellous opportunity to become truly catholic if she adopts the style of inculturation; but for this 'she should lay aside her western defensive armament and be ready for encounter, ready for incarnation in the world'¹⁰.

c) Ecumenical communion, an expression of the unity of the Church

There is difference between unity and communion. The former can be achieved by adhering to a principle or to a law. Unity has its stress in the centre. Communion, instead, indicates the possibility of the existence of diversities. It is the acceptance of persons who are different. Here the strength is in acceptance than in adherence. The ecumenical communion of the Churches has a very important role to play in being Church today. The ecclesial structures will have to be articulated keeping this also as a norm.

d) Cultural diversity as one of the elements in determining identity of the Church

In the early times Churches were known through their particular names which indicated the place where the communities lived: the Church in Corinth, the Church in Rome etc. In the middle ages, patriarchates which amalgamated these local Churches into power-centred administrative units were formed. Thus we have the origin of the rites of the Church. For the third world Churches these patriarchal or ritual structures have no meaning. If we were to return to the earlier practice, we could have today

9. *Ad Gentes* n. 10

10. Walbert Buhlmann, *The Coming of the third Church*, Slough, England 1976 p. 297.

churches that exist in particular places in Asia, Africa and America, instead of having everywhere the Roman Church. Such Churches will be able to contribute richly to the catholic communion through their diversities.

e) Kingdom-centred communities

The ultimate aim of preaching the Gospel is to establish the kingdom of God in the world. The kingdom has two components: the human reality in its existential situation and the Gospel of Christ that transforms it. The particular ecclesial structure is only at the service of the Gospel and the people. In many places today we can never build up the structured ecclesia as we understand it. The Gospel will have to act always as a leaven, hidden in the mass. This will call for a new way of being with a new set of structures.

4. The vision of an emerging ecclesial structure

The vision of the Church which Vatican II has presented us cannot be fully realized if we do not make the necessary changes in our structures. However, there are two conditions necessary in order to effect this: the first is to have a sense of mission. The structure should emerge, not so much from a concern for administrative efficiency as from a deep sense of mission. Such a structure will both be firmly orthodox and relevantly flexible. It will necessarily emerge from the context having its roots in the universal communion. The second condition is to have a spirit of conversion. The ecclesial structures are not merely the external constructions; but they embody the Spirit who dwells within. They are expressions of one Person in many persons. If the many persons are self-centred, they can manipulate the Spirit and render the mission ineffective. Now we shall try to propose certain structures that we need, especially here in India in order that the Church may fulfill her mission effectively in this country:

- a) Every parish and every diocese should make permanent provision for inter-religious dialogue. This dialogue should become a regular feature in our Christian communities.
- b) Our parishes should be structured in such a way that they become evangelizing communities. For this basic Christian communities are very useful. These basic Christian communities should also become the nucleus of wider basic human communities.

- c) It is necessary to have a symbol system and to conduct on a regular basis the celebrations in which all, including the people of other religions, can take part.
- d) We need to evolve apostolic projects in which all people, including people of other religions can take part.
- e) Just as we have a parish community, we can also think of a type of kingdom community in which all those who have accepted the Gospel, but cannot receive Baptism due to certain social situations, can be members.
- f) The effort to give cultural expression to liturgy and spirituality will result in the formation of Churches that have their own cultural identity. This will slowly replace the ritual distinction. The structure of such a Church will primarily be local.
- g) The system of government in these Churches will be organized primarily with a view to the mission. This will give a lot of flexibility to the structure. The form it will take will very much depend on the type of the mission and the manner of fulfilling it in the context.

Conclusion

The Church is called the body of Christ. This very clearly puts in evidence that its unity is more organic than organizational. The strength of this unity comes from within, while the strength of an organization has its source outside itself, such as its constitutions and bye-laws. In the case of an organizational structure, we have first the structure and then the persons who operate within it and with it. Instead in the case of an organism, it is the constituent parts themselves, having an internal cohesion, that sustain it. In India we need a church that lives in its members who are filled with the Spirit of Christ and led by the Spirit of Christ. Our communion with the universal Church will not be in the first place on the level of structures, but on the level of faith and love. In order to realize this vision, the starting point should be the small communities or basic communities. These will give origin and shape to the structures on higher levels, always maintaining that it is the Spirit of Jesus that vivifies all the Churches and keeps them in communion. The monolithic unity may help in the administration of the Church; but it will very much diminish the efficacy of the mission. The pluriformity of structures will, instead facilitate the Christian vocation of

every cultural group to contribute in a creative manner to the building up of the Kingdom in the variety of contexts in which the Church operates. It will really be the kingdom of God because the structures will function only as instruments of God. Instead in a uniform structure, there is danger of building up a kingdom that is tainted by the institutional interest of a particular group of the people of God. It will appear holy; but it will be the holy Roman empire in which the Roman will take the upperhand and prevent the creativity of the local Church which is also animated by the Spirit from becoming operative. From this it is clear that the change of structures is not merely meant to affirm the autonomy of a particular ecclesial community, but its purpose is the effectiveness of the mission. The Church in India can fulfill her mission to the people in India fully and in a relevant manner only when she can express her sacramentality in terms of a structure that is assumed from the culture of the people. It is evident that in doing this the universal communion should never be sacrificed; rather, this should enhance the richness of the universal communion.

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The Ethics of the Sermon on the Mount: Its Relevance for and Challenge to Our Times

Joseph Pathrapankal

The sermon on the Mount is not a treatise on Christian ethics, but the end product of a long faith-reflection and literary process in the early Church bringing together various teachings of Jesus on discipleship. In it we have the sound principles and orientations of Christian praxis for all times.

What does it mean to be a Christian today? Does it add anything to our being human? The question is very relevant in our times as Christianity and Christian life are being constantly challenged from several quarters. On the one hand, there is the challenge of other World Religions, also having their own spiritual wealth and value systems. Though in the past one could easily say that no religion other than Christianity ever inculcated purity of heart and sympathy for the sorrowing¹, and that the ethics of India is defective, illogical and antisocial, lacking any philosophical foundations, nullified by abhorrent ideas of asceticism and ritual, altogether inferior to the higher spirituality of Europe,² today it is no more possible to brand any religion as having an inferior status and impoverished ethics. In fact, it is becoming more and more a common phenomenon that Christians from the West are flocking to the Ashrams of India for learning from their *gurus*, new meanings in life. Even otherwise the Church today recognizes the positive

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1 Prof. McKenzie in his book *Hindu Ethics* as quoted by E.W. Hopkins, *Ethics of India*, New Haven, 1924, p. ix.

2 *ibid* pp. x-xi

values of other religions, as is clearly taught in the Declaration of Vatican II on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*), which positively states that christians have to accept and respect other religions also as ways of salvation.³

Besides the challenge of other religions Christianity also faces the challenge rising from secular humanism which tries to develop a world vision without faith and religion. Science and technology have revolutionized the concept of the human person and of the world as a whole, which is now seen as humanity's home. The humans want to be completely and totally human in the very centre of a humanized world with less and less recognition of religious values and with more and more acceptance of secular values. To a certain extent the Church and Christian theology also to a certain extent have come to terms with this secularization process as is clear from the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*).⁴

Closely associated with this phenomenon called humanism is the challenge of a "religionless christianity", advocated by some theologians, namely, a christianity which tries to transcend the structures, organization-

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- 3 The expression "Non-Christian" in India seems to be a reminiscence of the old colonial thinking still active in the minds of many Christians in India. It is absurd for a religion constituting only 2.5% of the population daring to call all others "non-Christians" while Hindus constituting almost 85% of the Indian population never call others "non-Hindus". It is high time for Christians to stop this derogatory expression. The same is true about the Western theologians' concession statement about "anonymous Christians" as applied to the followers of other religions, if they practise the teachings of Jesus in their lives.
 4. Commenting on this daring document of Vatican II, Robert McAfee Brown writes: "Although the final version is more realistic about man's sin than were earlier drafts, there needs to be more recognition of the pervasiveness of sin in men and human institutions, so that the hopes raised by the tone of the document will not be unnecessarily dimmed by the hard realities of the world. The ongoing power of evil is a theme to which more attention could have been given. If this is Protestant pessimism, it is at least a pessimism we have learned from Scripture and tradition as well as from the daily newspaper". Cf. W. Abbot, *The Documents of Vatican II*, Guild Press, New York, 1966, pp. 315-316.

al aspects and dogmas, and consequently wants to become more as a style and way of life. Theologians recall the fact that for the author of the Acts of the Apostles Christianity was more a way of life, technically known as *the Way* (*he hodos*) (Acts 9:2; 24: 14-16). The structures and dogmas of the church are seen as deviations from the original spirit of Jesus of Nazareth, contributing practically nothing for a meaningful life of following Christ in a personal manner. In a world come of age Christianity as a religion is understood by many as having no big role to play. That this is not a view maintained by some secularized theologians is clear from the fact that now in many countries new forms of Christian life are being evolved, such as Basic Christian Communities, New Catechumenate, Charismatic Movements, New Age Movement, which are all a real challenge to the traditional forms of Christianity. It is against the background of these challenges that we have to ask ourselves: "What does it mean to be a Christian today?". What is the essence of being Christian? What constitutes the praxis of being a christian today?

In 1977 H. Kung wrote his famous book entitled *On Being a Christian* (German: *Das Christsein*),⁵ a summa of Christian faith and praxis, as an attempt to discover the identity and meaning of being a Christian in the midst of an epoch-making upheaval of the Church's doctrine, morality and discipline. The very fact of this book coming from a person who wrote his controversial book on Infallibility evoked interest in some and suspicion in others. As a matter of fact, the publication of this book was out of the genuine interest of a committed theologian who wanted that Christianity, the Church and Christian life itself must be relevant and meaningful in our times. Soon after Vatican II a new culture of a post-Christian era was gradually emerging all over the world and in many cases it adversely affected the vitality of the Church and Christian life in general. Some blamed the Second Vatican Council as responsible for this situation while others argued that Vatican II provided an opportunity to many Christians to examine the kind of Christian life they were practising. The Council was a critical event, a time of discernment inviting people to see the good from the bad, the relevant from the irrelevant. And it was a necessary stage in the ongoing history of the Church.

5. H.Kung, *On Being a Christian*, Translated by E. Quinn Collins, New York, 1977.

In a certain sense the above-discussed challenges are a blessing for the Church. Though Vatican II tried to make the Church a servant Church through a process of radical conversion, more than 30 years after the Council it is being felt that the traditional spirit of triumphalism continues more or less in many areas of the administration of the church even in our times. It would appear that the Church cannot afford to remain a servant community for too long after she had enjoyed the royal splendour, transmitted to her from the time of Constantine the Great. The Church of all times and of all Christians together, whether in the First, Second or Third World, must listen together to what Jesus really meant when he preached the Good News of the kingdom of God. They have to examine whether Jesus founded a way of life, a movement or a religion to fight for its superiority over other religions with its concept of uniqueness and universality. Theologians must examine whether the claims they raise about Christ and his Church have grown out of their deeper faith in Christ and genuine love for him or expressions of a kind of superiority complex developed through centuries of colonialism.

Now that we are coming to the close of the second millennium, a time has come for re-examining what the church is for and what she is all about. It is important to realize that, after 2000 years, church is still a "little flock" and it shall be so whatever be the size, nature and thrust of her evangelizing work. At the same time, she should recall the words of assurance given to her by Christ: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Abba's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Lk 12:32). The reason why the Church should not be afraid is that Abba has been pleased to give her the kingdom to serve it and to work for it. Hence her primary concern should not be about how big she can become, but how much she can contribute to the growth of the kingdom of God. It is this Kingdom - centrism that has to be the leit-motiv of the faith and praxis of the Church and the impact of this conviction has to control the quality of the life and activities of Christians all over the world. The mission of the Church and Christians is one of bearing radical witness to Christ who came to serve and not to be served (Mk 10:45).

The challenge of what it means to be a Christian was always there from the very beginning of the Christian movement. It started with the challenge posed by Stephen in the early part of the first century of the Christian Era, when he questioned the sectarian understanding of the Christian reality entertained by the Jerusalem Church under the leadership of the close

disciples of Jesus (Acts 6:8-7:60). He had to pay high cost for that with his own life. When the Greeks were admitted into the Church, the question became more serious and Paul had to hold on to his view about faith in Christ as the radical reality of being a true Christian. The Council of Jerusalem provided the opportunity for the leaders of the Church to examine the inner reality of being a follower of Christ, although problems related to this issue continued to threaten the Christian movement, as it happened in the Churches in the region of Galatia. Paul had to face other major challenges from the Greek Christian communities themselves, when some of them considered their christian commitment as a pretext for a loose morality with such slogans as: "All things are lawful for me" (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23). Many of the Pauline letters are attempts to bring the Christian communities back to their radical commitment to Christ with all that it implied for their Christian life.

Dimensions and Dynamics of Religion

The major issue in all this confusion about inner essence of Christianity is related to a common religious phenomenon, according to which the essence of religions undergoes a radical change in course of time, as a result of which very often distorted and distorting ideas creep in. All religious movements have their starting-point in a mystical experience of God in his relational dimensions, in and through which the pioneers of these religious movements encounter the divine and the human, and then communicate this experience often in a rather feeble manner to their disciples and followers. Since this experience is a very personal one, it cannot be fully communicated, much less can it be articulated and dogmatized. For Jesus of Nazareth it was his *abba experience of God* which was for him the basis and the most powerful force of his ministry, his words as well as his deeds. It is true in its own way of other religious leaders, such as Buddha and Mohammed. The *rishis* of Hinduism also claim to have had such experience of God through *sruti* as the basis of their *smriti* and its further articulation in the Vedas.

The immediate disciples of Jesus were thoroughly and profoundly transformed by their sharing in this mystical experience of Jesus communicated to them, and it is beautifully described by John in his letter: "We write to you about the Word of life, which has existed from the beginning. We have heard it, and we have seen it with our eyes; yes, we have seen it,

and our hands have touched it. When this life became visible, we saw it; so we speak of it and tell you about the eternal life which was with the Father and was made known to us. What we have seen and heard we announce to you, so that you will join us in the fellowship that we have with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this in order that our joy may be complete" (1 Jn 1:1-4). The last sentence of this passage is very important: "We write this in order that our joy may be complete". What the author wanted was not to communicate a doctrine, but to share his experience and through that sharing to complete his joy, because a joy shared is joy completed. The essence of belonging to this fellowship is neither to believe in a set of doctrines nor to abide by a set of laws of behaviour; rather it means to belong to the realm of the same experience.

In course of time, as generations passed by, the need arose for this experience to be articulated in a human language. In fact, it is the only way in which later generations could have at least a partial glimpse of the original experience. This attempt at doctrinal articulation results in a basic difference in the approach to the same experience. We can see it already in the Gospels which were written during the latter half of the first century with their beginnings already during the years not long after the death and resurrection of Jesus. In fact, the early Church tried to fuse into one the *abba experience* that was transmitted to them by Jesus and its own *Jesus experience*, encountered especially in his death and resurrection. Though the four Gospels have their own specific approach to the person and message of Jesus, they complement each other and no evangelist ever tried to disprove the other evangelist on any issue because they were fully aware of the inexhaustible nature of their Jesus experience, which is hinted at in the final verse of the Gospel of John: "There are many other things that Jesus did. If they were all written down one by one, I suppose that the whole world could not hold the books that would be written" (Jn 21:25).

This is not the case as the distance from the original experience increases. On the one hand, in course of time the intensity of the original experience decreases and on the other hand, human and selfish motivations creep in, through which certain people take upon themselves the right to formulate and define the original experience. This we see in Christianity already during the latter half of the first century and later on with greater intensity during the following centuries. The controversies about who Jesus of Nazareth was, are very much reflected in the three letters of John and the

letter to the Colossians. Heretical doctrines are condemned in the second letter of Peter and the letter of Jude, and also in the Pastoral letters. The Apostolic Fathers and the Fathers of the church both in the East and West had to confront several heretical doctrines about Christ and his relation to God. The emergence of the schools of Alexandria and Antioch is a clear proof of doctrinal confrontations which became characteristic of later centuries. The many stories about the various "heresies" in the history of the church and the way in which these heresies were handled reveal the fact that there were many personal issues in these controversies, in which religion became more and more an object of manipulation and testing of might and power.

This doctrinal articulation and consequent stabilization of religion enter into a third stage, which can be called the ritual, cultic and sacramental articulation, in which the original mystical experience is expected to be communicated through ritual and cultic symbols. As such, these ritual expressions are meant for recapturing the original experience to some extent and thereby enable the followers of a religion to have a direct contact with the enriching source of their religious commitment. The origin of the various Rites in the church can be attributed to a process of articulating the means of this religious experience. In fact, they have their importance for the healthy growth of a religion. However, as it often happens, here again there arise conflicts and controversies with the result that the vitality and dynamism of the religion are very often lost sight of in the struggle for identity and preservation of tradition. Since rituals are something tangible and emotionally charged, they tend to become the ultimate realities of religion, claiming their own theology, ethics, discipline and even spirituality. This naturally leads to new claims of superiority and consequent uneasiness even within the same religion. In fact, the vitality and dynamism of Christianity were to some extent lost either through the domination of the Rite over others or through struggles for independence and autonomy among the other Rites.

There could also be a fourth dimension through which religion exercises its identity and inner organizational authority and this may be called the legal and disciplinary dimension of a religion. All organized religions have their own disciplinary systems and regulations. We can very well understand the need of laws and regulations as a guiding and controlling factor in enabling the followers of a religion to remain disciplined and committed.

Whatever be the good and generosity of the people, human nature being what it is, the need arises for those who are in charge of these people to safeguard the integrity of the religion by imposing legal prescriptions and positive measures of action. The religion of Israel, as we encounter it in the Pentateuch, is known for its laws and regulations, especially in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, which are later codifications. Many of these laws were borrowed from the legal corpora of the neighbouring peoples, to which were added cultic and other disciplinary laws proper to Israel to ensure the efficient administration of its religious practices. The New Testament also refers to certain disciplinary aspects of Christian life such as the directives given in the community discourse in Mt 18: 15-18 and the process of excommunication of an indisciplined Christian described in 1 Cor 5:1-13. Once Christianity got identified with the Roman political system, the Roman law became the pattern of the laws of the Church and this we can still see in the Codes of Canon Law practised in the Catholic Church, as in the sections titled: "Sanctions in the Church", "Processes", "Trials", "Contentious Trials", "Penal Sanctions in the Church", and "The Procedure for imposing Penalties". The same is true about the Constitutions, Statutes and Directories of Religious Congregations. In all these it could happen that the emphasis is shifted from the essence to the accidentals, from the primary to the secondary.

The above discussion about the various dimensions of religion is not to discredit the importance of one or the other aspect of religion, but to highlight the issues which emerge in the process of the growth of a religion. Such a discussion is important in our times precisely because the followers of all religions are becoming more and more critical and selective in their attitude to religion and religious practices. We also need to look at these various dimensions in order to establish the central issues of religious thinking so much confused and complicated in our times. Even a sacred reality such as religion can easily get engulfed in secondary issues and create an atmosphere in which even well-meaning followers of religion begin to question the relevance and meaning of religion.

What is therefore essential about all religions is that they should always try to get back to the meaning and vitality of the original mystical experience and from there to derive the strength and vitality for a meaningful exercise of one's own religion. At the level of this mystical experience the differences between religions and religious groups diminish,

and understanding and appreciation between them increase. It is at this stage of mystical experience that religions emerge as an enriching reality for the whole humankind. It is also at this level that religions become a much simpler reality, bringing about a happy integration of orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

Orthodoxy vis-a-vis Orthopraxy

A related shifting of emphasis and consequent confusion of issues resulting in an unhealthy attitude to religion is the priority given to orthodoxy over orthopraxy: doctrine as the basis of praxis, faith as the basis of an orderly life. As such, there is nothing wrong about this approach. There must be perfect harmony and correspondence between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The problem lies in the sequence of these two issues and the consequent attitude and mentality that are developed among the followers of a religion. Moreover, when orthodoxy precedes orthopraxy, the tendency is there to judge the latter to suit the former. Let us take the example of the administration of the sacraments. The sacraments are, as such, supposed to impart grace and life to those who take part in their administration. But the moment the doctrinal aspects are given priority, such as validity and other related issues surrounding their administration, the sacraments are deprived of their power to impart meaning for the life of the believers. They become more and more concerned about rubrics and rituals.

When Jesus started preaching in Galilee, what he did was not to explain the content of the kingdom of God or the meaning of *metanoia* and faith, but to invite men and women to be converted and committed to the new way of life inaugurated by him: "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand. Be converted and committed to this Good News" (Mk 1: 14-15). Jesus did not rationalize the concept of loving the enemies; rather he asked his hearers to love the enemies, pray for them and do good to them (Lk 6: 27-28). For Jesus of Nazareth the main thrust of his preaching was taking a decision and starting to live according to that decision. The freedom and demands of the new way of living inaugurated by Jesus was not primarily guided by a system of doctrine but by a call to action. It was a freedom of the children of God, who was proposed to them as their *abba* and whom they had to take seriously through their love and commitment.

It is true that the Gospels also have their doctrinal formulations and Jesus is also presented by all evangelists as a teacher (*didaskalos*), who was teaching the disciples as well as the crowds. In fact, much of this teaching in the Gospels are further articulations of the basic teaching given by Jesus during his earthly ministry. We are told in the Acts of the Apostles that the believers devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42). The early Church formulated its teaching of Jesus under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and gave new orientations to it in the changed circumstances of the Christian communities. The New Testament letters are all attempts at formulating the various aspects of Christian life in which doctrine also plays an important role. Pauline letters are known for their doctrinal contributions. We see this doctrinal preoccupation very much in the Pastoral letters.

Doctrine for the early Church was the formulation of its praxis, and it was also understood as a framework for the praxis. As a result, there was always the flexibility in the application of the doctrine because the fundamental principle was that "sabbath was made for humans, and not humans for sabbath" (Mk 2:27). For Jesus of Nazareth the human person was more important, whether they were sinners or saints, Jews or Greeks or Samaritans. What was required of all was that they should have the basic openness to God, a readiness to change for the better. It is precisely this ethics of conversion and commitment that is embodied in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1-7:29). It is in this consolidated articulation of the teaching of Jesus that we can still discover what it means to be a Christian today. Here we can also see what Christians have to do and consequently what they have to believe. The theological and literary activity that lies behind the making of this discourse is a proof of the abiding power of the Sermon on the Mount for later centuries. What we urgently need today is to recapture some of the ethical perspectives of this Sermon and apply them to practical life. They have a power to enlighten minds and inspire persons to commit themselves to a new style of life, especially in the realm of interpersonalism and also in their attitude and approach towards God and things divine.

Ethical Perspectives of the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is not an *ex professo* treatise on Christian ethics taught by Jesus; rather it is the end product of a long faith reflection

and literary process in the early Church, probably in the Palestinian Jewish Christian community, through which it brought together various teachings of Jesus about discipleship. We can see in it a convergence of the ethics of the Old Testament and a re-interpretation of Jewish ethics. The greatest commandment of the Old Testament to love God with all one's heart, with all one's soul, and with all one's might (Dt 6:5) had got diluted in the legalistic interpretation of the Torah in later Judaism, and hence the first task of Jesus was to bring the Law and the Prophets to a re-interpretation and thereby to its fulfilment (Mt 5:17). Hence the summary of the entire Sermon is given in the solemn statement: "Unless your *dharma*⁶ exceeds that of the Scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:20). In the context of this better *dharma* the disciples were welcomed into the kingdom of God with its vertical and horizontal dimensions of relationship. What was required of all to practise this *dharma* was the "poverty of the spirit" (Mt 5:3) through which they had to acknowledge their own powerlessness and at the same time commit themselves to God, the *abba*, and to his providential care about the whole humankind and the entire cosmos.

By proposing that the ethical principles of the Sermon on the Mount offer the basic framework for being a Christian today, we do not mean that these principles can be applied and practised as such without any adaptation to the changed conditions and circumstances of our times. That would be a dangerous and at the same time fundamentalistic approach. At the same time, we can confidently say that in the Sermon on the Mount we have the sound principles and orientations of Christian praxis for all times. We give here some basic characteristics underlying this discourse which show the abiding value of this unique contribution of the New Testament for Christian life. These ethics of the Sermon on the Mount have to be always safeguarded in all our discussions about the meaning and dimensions of Christian life, whether it be at the doctrinal, ritual or the disciplinary levels. As a preliminary step towards understanding these ethical perspectives of

6 We prefer the expression *dharma* to *righteousness* as a translation of the greek *dikaioyne* and the Hebrew *zedeq* because the former is more intelligible and meaningful, especially in the Indian situation. Cf. J. Pathrapankal, "Righteousness and Dharma" in *Christian Life: New Testament Perspectives*, Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 1982, pp. 35-48.

the Sermon on the Mount we look at some of the basic characteristics of this discourse.

- a) *The authority of Jesus* : The first and the most important characteristic of the Sermon is the authority that lies behind every statement in the teaching of Jesus. Starting with the assurance that the poor in spirit are blessed (Mt 5:3), it goes all the way to the parable of the builders of two houses with its promise and warning about the commitment the hearers have to make about Jesus' teaching. While re-interpreting the Old Testament and Jewish practices Jesus made his authority very clear: "But I say to you" (Mt 5:22, 28, 32,34,39,44). He however never tried to prove where his authority comes from. Authority is basically authenticity and it is not to be proved; rather it is to be demonstrated and, as such, it is recognized by all.
- b) *Interiority* : The thrust of the Sermon on the Mount is its call to interiority. External actions have their meaning and importance only in so far as they reveal the inner person and his/her motivations. A religion without interiority and inner depth does not contribute anything to its followers.
- c) *Interpersonalism* : An equally important characteristic of this Sermon is the emphasis on interpersonal relationship. This interpersonalism is based on the fact that all humans form one family of brothers and sisters with God as their *abba*, their Father and Mother. In the six antitheses proposed by Jesus in Mt 5: 21-48, all of them deal with interpersonal relationship, respect for persons constituting the most important factor. In fact, it is one of the essential characteristics of the kingdom of God preached by Jesus.
- d) *Humanism of the Sermon on the Mount* : The ethics of this Sermon is not of an other-worldly character; rather it deals with the things of this world, with our own secular world, but with its eschatological orientation. The Sermon does not promote a flight from the world; rather it is a call to face the challenge of daily life with its ups and downs. The examples Jesus brings in to clarify his teaching are all taken from nature: salt, lamp, flowers, birds, good and bad fruits, and the houses that are built on the rock and on the sand. Jesus wants his disciples to appear normal citizens of this world having the capacity to affirm, deny and transcend this world.

Ethics of the Sermon on the Mount: Closer Analysis

In the light of the above considerations we give here below the ethical insights of some of the important sections of the Sermon on the Mount. These insights help us to focus our attention on what Jesus demands from his followers.

a) *A Better Dharma* (5:20): After the Babylonian captivity Judaism had developed its own concept of *dharma* (*zedeq*), as consisting of a literal and legalistic interpretation of the Torah and the practice of three acts of *dharma* : almsgiving, prayer and fasting. Characteristic of this understanding of *dharma* was legalism and ostentation as is revealed in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector (Lk 18:9-14). It was only natural that self-righteous persons despised others who were not experts in the details of the Torah and its practice, as was the case with the tax-collector. Jesus, in his turn, wanted his followers to practise a more personalized *dharma*, by which they were to give importance to the inner person and its motivations rather than to mere external actions. It is around the concept of this better *dharma* that the entire ethical considerations of the Sermon on the Mount and the meaning of discipleship in the kingdom of God are analysed and developed.

b) *Ethics of the Beatitudes* (5:3-12) : The Sermon on the Mount is presented by Matthew as an authoritative teaching of Jesus about discipleship and its praxis. Jesus sat down on the mountain and from the depth of his heart and personal authority (5:2) he taught the disciples and the crowds who were around him. The beatitudes are at the same time a pronouncement of blessings on and an invitation to the hearers. The first thing he had to tell them was the importance and need of "poverty of the spirit" (5:3), namely, the importance of having a realization of one's own nothingness and a consequent need of dependence on God. The basic requirement on the part of everyone confronting God is one of self-emptying, *kenosis*. Abram was called by God and he was asked to go out of his country, from his kindred and from his father's house to an unknown place (Gen 12:1). His response to God who was guiding him was one of faith and trust in God (Gen 15:6). Abram was poor in spirit and it was the basis of the blessing he received in abundance for himself and his posterity.

The beatitudes belong to the category of blessings pronounced by Jesus to those who followed him and at the same time it is an invitation to all to become poor in spirit in order to benefit from the blessings of the kingdom

of God. The kingdom of God, the new situation of vertical and horizontal relationship within the fatherly and motherly guidance of God, is available only to those who are ready to empty themselves and accept the lot of those who wait for God's blessings. The nine beatitudes (5:3-12) bring out the various aspects and dimensions of this poverty of the spirit, such as meekness, hunger and thirst after *dharma*, mercy and purity of heart. Those who choose this poverty will have to face opposition and suffer persecution, and thereby they will belong to the category of the prophets, who stood for God, spoke for him and had to undergo persecution for the cause they had undertaken (5:12).

c) *Ethics of the Parables of Salt and Light* (5:13-16): Immediately after the call to poverty of the spirit, Jesus illustrates the inner dynamism of this quality of the disciples through two parables, the details of which are taken from the nature around and from the ordinary life experience of the people. The parables very well explain how the salt and light have to undergo a process of self-emptying to fulfil their task of giving taste and light to others. The parables also show how the disciples have to belong to this world which they have to serve and transform. Moreover, the salt is one of the most available and at the same time a very common, and indispensable thing. It gives taste, it preserves things from decay, it heals wounds. For all these the salt has to dissolve, lose its individuality and preserve its identity. The followers of Jesus have to fulfil all these functions in their relationship to the community to which they belong. In the parable of the light Jesus exhorts his disciples to perform good works (*kala erga*), namely, works which are both ethically and aesthetically good, which will add glory to the Father in heaven.

d) *Ethics of the Radical Interpretation of Torah* (5:21-48): Jesus gave six sample teachings to illustrate how his own understanding of the Torah was very different from that of Scribes and Pharisees. Whereas the Jewish theologians were only concerned about the literal application of many of the prescriptions in the Torah, Jesus tries to bring out the inner meaning of these laws. Hence, for Jesus, it was not a question of doing or not doing something, but of the inner spirit of the law which was to guide the praxis of the disciples. The fact that all are God's children and that interpersonal relationships form one of the main constituents of orthopraxy, this central idea controls the entire teaching of this section. In the question of murder, adultery, divorce, swearing, retaliation, and love of enemies Jesus insisted

on the sacredness of the other, because every other is a brother or a sister. There is no question of any harsh or humiliating word to others (5:21-26) or of treating others as objects of your pleasure (5:27-30), or of selling people like commercial goods (5:31-32). The disciples must show maximum honesty and integrity in personal transactions (5:33-37) and be generous towards others, ready to go two miles instead of the minimum one (5:38-42). As one author has put it well: "Christianity flowers in the second mile."

The climax of this interpretation of the inner meaning of the Torah is reached in Jesus proposing *Abba* as the perfect model and goal to his followers (5:48). According to some scholars, the Aramaic equivalent of the Greek *teleios*, translated as 'perfect' or 'mature' in Mt 5:48 is *tamim*, which means 'simple', as opposed to 'complex'. It means that *Abba* is simple, straight forward and not calculating and scheming as we humans are. Already in the natural order we see how God sends his rain to fall and allows his sun to rise on everyone, good and bad, saints and sinners. Any one, for that matter, has a share in the glorious humanity created by God and consequently everyone has a right to be loved and respected, and *Abba* sets the best example to all humans to follow.

e) *Ethics of the Radicalization of the three Jewish pious Practices* (6:1-18): As Islam is built on five pillars, specified as Monotheism, Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving and Pilgrimage, so also Jewish piety (*dikaio-syne*) was condensed in three pious practices, namely, Almsgiving, Prayer and Fasting. Whereas the observance of the Torah in Judaism was characterized by legalism, these pious practices were very often performed with the motivation of making a show of oneself before others. Piety was for many Jews commercial goods to sell and make a profit from, rather than an exercise of personal relationship between them and God. As in the previous cases, Jesus here also insists on the quality of relationship between God and humans as the criterion for the quality of these pious practices. Three times the evangelist writes: "Your *Abba* who sees in secret will reward you" (6:4,6,18). Here we have to note that this reward is not to be understood in a *do ut des* sense, but rather as related to the inner joy of the children living and acting before their *abba*. As a matter of fact, there cannot be any question of a reward between parents and children. The greatest reward the children could have from their parents is the privilege of their belonging to the parents with all that it means for them with their sense of freedom, joy

and peace.

f) *Ethics of trusting in the Providence of Abba* (9: 19-34): The relationship between the *abba* and the children takes a new turn in this section in so far as the children are asked to develop a correct vision (eye) of things. They should have a generous and broad (*haplos*) vision (6:22) of things here on earth. If their vision is not correct, their whole being will be in darkness and in the wrong direction (6: 22-23). The important issue about the correct vision is that the disciples should never have treasures (*thesauros*) here on earth (6: 19-21). If they keep anything here on earth as treasures, their attention will be fixed on that. Rather the disciples should have their treasures in transcendent values, values that cannot be destroyed. In 6:24 it is further explained in terms of their being a slave (*doulos*) either of God or of *mamon*. Whereas God is a person, *mamon* is a thing and to be a slave of *mamon* means to practise idolatry.

In 6:25-34 there is a long and persuading discourse of Jesus about how the children must trust in their *abba* for everything they are in need of, food and drink and clothes. Reasons for this are taken from the nature around and also from human psychology. The children are exhorted to live and grow without anxiety (*merimna*). Psychologically speaking, the opposite of having possessions as treasures on earth is to have anxiety. But Jesus does not want his disciples to have anxiety at all. Between the safety given by possessions and the anxiety created by non-posessions there is the tranquillity of trust and confidence in the providence of *Abba*. Jesus invites all his disciples, then and now, to learn from nature, from the flowers of the field and the birds of the air, which are sometimes better teachers than humans. With anxiety the disciples can gain nothing. At the same time, it is not a call to passivity and laziness, because the birds of the air are not lazy. They work hard; but they show no anxiety. There is an art of living which takes life in its real concreteness without worrying about tomorrow that does not exist at all. The disciples must be totally committed to the kingdom and its *dharma*, and all things will be given them.

g) *Ethics of the Eschatological Dimensions of Christian Life* (7; 1-23): To be a disciple means to accept the challenge of everyday life. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus always insists on the demands of daily life. But discipleship has also an eschatological dimension in so far as the existential dimension reaches out to the eschatological dimension. The first of these teachings centres on the common phenomenon of judging others, practised

by practically all categories of people in all realms of life (7: 1-5). There is a 'Pharisee' in everyone who tries to put down all others in order to extol oneself (Lk 18:9). Hence Jesus refers to the lack of logic in judging others. The whole scene of human judgement here below is placed in the larger context of eschatological judgement when all will have to stand before God, and the nature of that judgement is given by Jesus in the parable of the Last Judgement with its accent on interpersonalism, altruism and empathy (Mt 25: 31-46).

In 7:13-14 Jesus places the disciples at the cross-roads of life and challenges them to choose between life and death, in the same way as Moses demanded it from the Israelites before they entered the promised Land (Dt 30: 15-20; cf. Jer. 21:8). Those who have decided to follow Jesus are asked to enter through the narrow gate and walk on the hard way. Life is a journey and all have to choose the road they want to walk through. The basic tendency of all is to choose the wide gate and the easy way. Jesus anticipates the experience of many of us telling us how difficult it would be for his hearers to select the narrow gate and the hard way (7:14), in a tempting world.

The unhealthy presence and activity of false prophets (7: 15-20) in the Christian community is another danger to an authentic discipleship, for they appear like sheep, but inwardly they are wild wolves. The criterion of finding out who a good prophet is and who a bad one is also given by Jesus: "You will know them by what kind of fruits they produce". The root of the tree decides the nature of the fruit they bear. This important exhortation is also meant to invite the disciples to produce good fruits for themselves and for others.

The most challenging teaching of Jesus about the ethics of discipleship in the Sermon on the Mount is that our final salvation is not decided by our profession of faith but by our doing the will of God, our Father and Mother (7: 21-23). All the claims made by people to demonstrate their orthodoxy as well as their capacity for prophesying and performing miracles will not have any effect in the final judgement. Such people are called "evil doers" (v. 23), and they have no place in the kingdom of God, and hence are cast out.

h) *Ethics of an Authentic Discipleship* (7: 24-27): At the conclusion of the long discourse Jesus illustrates the strength and weakness of the quality of discipleship his followers could build up after they had listened

to the words of Jesus. The difference is between wise persons and foolish ones who hear the same words of Jesus. Whereas the wise persons build their Christian discipleship on solid foundations, the foolish ones build it on shaky foundations with the result that these two categories of people face challenges to their Christian life, the former remaining firm and safe and the latter collapsing and perishing. Jesus concludes: "How sad!".

Jesus' illustration was valid in the first century, and it is relevant and valid in a much more radical manner in our own times. The whole question of being a Christian is reflected in the teaching of Jesus in this discourse. It is true that times have changed, value systems also have undergone radical changes. Some of the teachings of Jesus in this discourse may not have a literal application in our times. They have to be re-interpreted and synchronized with our situations. But as a whole, the ethical teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount has an important place in life all over the world. It is a question of entering into the spirit of the teaching of Jesus and there we can still see the challenge of being a Christian today. As W.S. Kissinger writes, the Sermon on the Mount is like a hound of heaven and it tracks us down the days and years and will not let us evade or escape its radical demands."

The Challenge of the Ethics of the Sermon on the Mount in our Times

The ethics of the Sermon on the Mount is an important framework for restoring and revitalizing Christian life in our times. It is the meeting point of the Old Testament ethics, the Jewish ethics and it is also the converging point for the ethics taught and practised in the various Christian Churches. More than that, here we have a point of reference to the teachings of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism and other World Religions. In 1931 during the Round Table Conference held in England, Lord Irwin asked Mahatma Gandhi from India what he had to propose as a way for peace in the world, and Mahatma Gandhi replied: "Put into practice the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount and there will be peace in the world." The strange thing about this story is that a Hindu had to teach a Christian about the importance and relevance of the Sermon on the Mount! But as one who was well trained in the ethics of Hinduism, Gandhiji could see the beauty and challenge of the Sermon on the Mount as the crowning point of all what he learned about life, religion and international relationship.

It may be noted that truthfulness, generosity, kindness of heart, purity of soul, forgiveness, and compassion were taught in India as everyday precepts long before the Christian era: "A seat for a guest, water, and a welcoming word should never be lacking in the house of good people" was an adage of Hindu hospitality. In Mahabharata, one of the greatest epics of Hinduism, we read: If a man be intemperate and lustful, of what use his penance, of what use his sacrifice?"⁷ India evolved for herself the idea of a merciful God, of a soul that must be pure, of a life that must be harmless and helpful, and the idea that people must seek to do what is beneficial to all humans.⁸ In Mahabharata we read: "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you"⁹, which sounds very much like the Golden Rule of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 7:12). Regarding judging others we read: "Attend not to others, as to whether their ways be perverse or not; regard not others, as to whether they do their duty or not; but regard thy own deeds, whether they are done well or not".¹⁰ Hindu ethics started with the training of the mind and the spirit. In fact, India has preserved a remarkable record in history of humans' never-ceasing effort to raise themselves above the control of the senses to a moral and spiritual height.¹¹

It is against this background of ethical principles contributed by different religious traditions of the world that we have to understand the crowning beauty of the Sermon on the Mount. It can be said that in the Sermon we have the ethics for the third millennium, especially in the context of a post-Christian era, which is threatening many of the Christian countries. As the fear of religious syncretism, secularization process and exaggerated humanistic thinking is growing, it is important that Christians today build up their orthopraxy on solid foundations. Ethics of the Sermon on the Mount stand above the dimensions and limitations of space and time and speak a language that is very much applicable to our times and culture.

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7. E.W. Hopkins *op. cit.* p. xii

8. *ibid.* p. xi

9. Mahabharata 12,270, 20.

10. Dhammapada 50.

11 Cf. E.W.Hopkins, *op. cit.* pp. 255-256.

Space for Different Views in the Church

Julian Saldanha

Considering the nature of the Church as participative model of communion and the long record of mistakes in the pastoral and doctrinal history of the Roman See, not to speak of others, there is ample space for views different from those of the ordinary magisterium.

Modern times have witnessed a renewed interest in the authority of the “ordinary magisterium”¹ of the bishops and, in particular, of the bishop of Rome. The cases of some celebrated theologians, who have been penalized in various ways for expressing a different view from that propounded by the ordinary magisterium, have acted as a catalyst in this discussion. In this connection, I wish to begin my comments from canon 1371, to which there corresponds no parallel canon in the Code of Oriental Canon Law. I shall use the translation of Coriden.

1. Respect for the ordinary magisterium

Canon 1371/1 states that “a person who teaches a doctrine condemned by the Roman Pontiff or by an ecumenical council or who pertinaciously rejects the doctrine mentioned in can. 752 and who does not make a retraction after having been admonished by the Apostolic See or by the ordinary”, is to be punished with a “just penalty”. The old Code, in force from 1917-1983, (N. 2317) had specified the penalties to be imposed: prohibition to preach, teach or hear confessions. The present canon leaves

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1. Pius IX (1863) seems to have been the first pope to use this phrase. It refers to non-infallible teaching directed to the whole Church, by the bishops or by the pope as head of the college of bishops.

the penalty to the discretion of the relevant authority. C. 752 inculcates an attitude of respect for the teaching of the ordinary magisterium, based on a presumption of right judgement on its part: "A religious respect (*obsequium*) of intellect and will, even if not the assent of faith, is to be paid to the teaching which the Supreme Pontiff or the college of bishops enunciate on faith or morals when they exercise the authentic magisterium even if they do not intend to proclaim it with a definitive act; therefore the Christian faithful are to take care to avoid whatever is not in harmony with that teaching." Orsy (88-89) observes that the Latin term *obsequium* can mean anything from "respect" to "submission" or anything in between, like "loyalty"; so it refers first to a general *attitude*, which can take various forms.

2. Contribution of others' opinions

This canon echoes the teaching of LG 25 and must be read together with two other passages from Vatican II. LG 37 acknowledges that, "An individual layperson, by reason of the knowledge, competence, or outstanding ability which he/she may enjoy, is permitted and sometimes even obliged to express his/her opinion on things which concern the good of the Church". This is to be done "in truth, in courage, and in prudence, with reverence and charity". While stressing the importance of religious practice and morality keeping pace with scientific knowledge and an ever advancing technology, LG 62 states categorically: "let it be recognized that all the faithful, clerical and lay, possess a lawful freedom of inquiry and of thought, and the freedom to express their minds humbly and courageously about those matters in which they enjoy competence." These rights are recognized in canons 212/3 and 218.

In an address delivered in Cologne in 1980, John Paul II accepted the difficulties which this can entail: "The Church desires an independent theological research which is distinct from the Church's magisterium, but shares with it a common ministry to the truth of faith and to the People of God. *Tensions and conflicts cannot be avoided.....*" (emphasis added).² And a great predecessor of his, Gregory I, said: "If scandal is taken at the truth, it is better to allow scandal to arise than to neglect the truth." In his Encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950), Pius XII stated that, "when the Roman

2. *L' Osservatore Romano*, 17-18 Nov 1980, p.2.

Pontiffs carefully pronounce on some subject which has hitherto been controverted, it must be clear to everybody that, in the mind and intention of the Pontiffs concerned, this subject can no longer be regarded as a matter of free debate among theologians". It is significant that, in referring to this statement, an earlier draft of *Lumen Gentium* read "public debate" instead of "free debate"; but even this was dropped in the final version! Today the advance of the media makes it hardly possible to keep theological debate confined to scholarly journals.

2.1 Critical assimilation of magisterium

The role of the theologian cannot be reduced to repeating magisterial statements. No doubt he/she must make a sincere effort to understand such statements and their foundation. An a priori attitude of discounting anything which emanates from the Church's *official* teachers is reprehensible; opposition to magisterium need not necessarily be prophetic. Self-righteousness, intolerance and craving for cheap popularity have to be avoided on all sides. Nevertheless, one owes it to one's loyalty to the Church to contribute to its teaching through constructive criticism. This process of critical assimilation is what is also called "reception" of Church teaching. The French Episcopal Conference observed that this reception enriches the magisterium "and also makes clear its limits and shows what is needed to complete or correct it."³

The faithful should not be compelled to assent to a non-infallible teaching, through the imposition of such severe punishments as the exclusion from offices or the denial of sacraments. There are other options open to Church authorities, e.g., to evaluate the theologian's disputed work, either by themselves or through other theologians; or to require him/her to clarify the point in future publications. Also, mutual criticism among theologians can be helpful. The need to eschew harsh penalties in this context is so much more advisable, since even in the case of apostasy, heresy or schism, it is difficult to determine precisely when an individual or group is guilty of the same according to law. In explaining this problem Coriden (920) remarks: "This is especially true given increased theological pluralism and ecumenical contacts and confessional boundaries that are

3. *One in Christ*, 1985, No. 4, p. 346

not as sharply defined as formerly... It might be better simply to declare formally an incompatibility between their faith and that of the Church." At any rate, the primary task of the magisterium is not to punish, but to provide guidance to the faithful.

Furthermore, there is always the danger that those trained in one school of theology may misunderstand those who speak from a different cultural milieu or historical conditioning. The bishops should play a more active *local* role, especially since it will probably be increasingly difficult for Rome to understand all theologies. The considerable measure of mutual agreement achieved during the last two decades in official dialogues between some Protestant and Catholic Theological Commissions, on highly divisive issues, illustrates the point made by H. Kung (350- '1) that every error contains a kernel of truth; in condemning the error, this kernel is often also condemned. Hence we must consider the truth in the error of others and the possible error in our own truth. This is close to that Asian cultural perspective described by A. Pieris: Indian theologians are heirs to an ancient cultural tradition which fostered open controversy "as a way of allowing even error to take its own time to say the truth it is trying to say"; the Roman See itself has "a long record of mistakes in its pastoral and doctrinal history" (*Concilium*, 1991, N. 5, p. xiv). If it is wrong to under-rate the magisterium, it is equally wrong to over-rate it.

2.2 *Errors of the ordinary magisterium*

This brings us to an aspect of the ordinary magisterium, which one must take into account, in order to arrive at a more balanced attitude towards it, namely the grave errors which have been taught by some bishops of Rome and some General Councils of the Church. Thus Pope Vigilius was excommunicated (553) for heresy by the General Council of Constantinople II; he later retracted. Pope Honorius I was posthumously condemned (680) as a heretic in the General Council of Constantinople III and placed in the same category as Arius and other heretics, by the General Council of Nicaea II (787). John XXII taught (1331) that access of the blessed to the vision of the Triune God, was delayed until the resurrection. He was opposed, among others, by the university of Paris. He retracted his opinion, only on the eve of his death.

In its Decree for the Jacobites (1442) the General Council of Florence

stated that the Church “firmly believes, professes and preaches that no one remaining outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews, heretics or schismatics, can become partakers of eternal life; but they will go to the ‘eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ (Mt 25.41), unless before the end of their life they are received into it” (Neuner, N. 810).⁴ The same Council stated in its Decree for the Greeks (1439) : “As for the souls of those who die in actual mortal sin or with original sin only, they go down immediately to hell, to be punished however with different punishments....” (ibid., N. 2309). Teachings like these were given by a series of about seven popes and three General Councils, over a period of well nigh six centuries. They probably led generations of missionaries, including Francis Xavier, to believe that “hell is filled with these” (non-Christians), as we have it in the indulgenced prayer composed by him.

A series of about six popes and four General Councils sanctioned the use of torture on those suspected of heresy, contrary to the clear teaching of an earlier pope, Nicholas I (866), who had condemned it as a violation of divine and human law. The tortures usually included starvation, the rack and burning coals. Thereafter, Vatican II (GS 27, 28) became the first Council to reverse the teaching on torture. E. Vacandard, in his book on the *Inquisition* (Longmans, N. York, 1921), does his best to present the Church in as good a light as the facts warrant. Still he comes to the sad conclusion:

“It is therefore proved beyond question that the Church, in the person of the Popes, used every means at her disposal, especially excommunication, to compel the State to enforce the infliction of the death penalty upon heretics. This excommunication, moreover, was all the more dreaded, because, according to the canons, the one excommunicated, unless absolved from the censure, was regarded as a heretic himself within a year’s time, and was liable therefore to the death penalty” (p. 105).

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4. Much prior to the council of Florence, there was awareness of vast numbers of Muslims and of Mongol hordes, who had not heard of the Gospel of Christ. The question of presuming them to be in bad faith did not arise. Hence on this score I cannot agree with F.A Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?* Geoffrey Chapman, 1992.

Execution was usually by strangling and/or burning at the stake.⁵

Six popes from Gregory VII (1075) to Pius V (1570) and also the General Council of Lateran V (1516) taught that the pope may depose emperors. Pius X taught (1907) that those who speak or write against the past or future decisions of the Pontifical Biblical Commission would be guilty of grave sin. Between 1908 and 1912 the Commission went on to hold that the Psalms were authored by David, the Pentateuch by Moses and the Epistle to the Hebrews by Paul; the book of Isaiah had only one author; the gospels were written in the present order in which they now appear. These views have since been abandoned. The teaching of Vatican II on ecumenism and religious freedom reverses many earlier statements on these topics.

2.3 *Suitable freedom*

These examples do not create a presumption against the reliability of the ordinary magisterium. But they do tell us that if error enters into the teaching of the magisterium, it can only be corrected if there are some persons who critique it. This is not possible if they do not enjoy appropriate freedom for the purpose, free from suspicion. When they propose a different view, this should be considered a possible *contribution* to the Church's teaching, and should be appreciated as a very important service to the Church. It is theologians like K. Rahner, H. De Lubac, Y. Congar, Courtney-Murray, who had earlier either been forbidden to teach or viewed with suspicion, who paved the way for a change in Vatican II.

Certainly the magisterium has the right and duty to teach the common faith and to speak authoritatively, lest the community of faith disintegrate. But before committing itself to a particular position or teaching, the magisterium should engage in wide consultation and dialogue. Vatican II acknowledged that the pastors of the Church cannot readily give a concrete solution to every problem which arises (GS 43; 33). Both in the Synods in Rome and in Episcopal Conferences, bishops should feel free to discuss topics which everyone else is discussing, such as the ordination of women and celibacy for clergy of the Latin Rite. Unfortunately episcopal

5. John Paul II recently instituted a 26-member theological historical Commission to study the root causes of anti-Semitism and the various forms of the Inquisition.

magisterium has come to be overshadowed by that of the bishop of Rome. An effort should be made to settle disagreements by consensus.

Our approach will be influenced by the *Church model* from which we operate. If revelation is entrusted to the whole Church, then all are responsible for its transmission, *all teach and learn*, though in different ways. In this model, there is no neat distinction between the teaching Church and the learning Church. Besides the Apostles, the New Testament acknowledges “teachers” (1 Cor 12.28). Several non-bishops, including women, are “Doctors” of the Church. We may conclude: “With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the *entire People of God*, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish, and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine Word” (GS 44: emphasis added). This is a participative model of Church communion.

3. Role of the College of bishops

I pass on now to canon 333/3: “There is neither appeal nor recourse against a decision or decree of the Roman Pontiff.” This is followed up by canon 1372: “One who takes recourse against an act of a Roman Pontiff to an ecumenical council or to the college of bishops is to be punished with a censure.” The earlier Code (N. 2332) contained a clause that such persons were suspect of heresy. It also laid down a more severe punishment: automatic excommunication specially reserved to the Apostolic See; in addition, universities, colleges and Chapters, guilty of the same act, would incur specially reserved interdict. To canon 1372 there corresponds no parallel canon in the Code of Oriental Canon Law.

3.1 Critical Situations

The question may be posed whether these canons, 333/3 and 1372, may not need to be abrogated, since it is difficult to see how they stand up to the realities of the Church, as seen in historical perspective? Several popes have been deposed in the Middle Ages, from the 11th to the 15th centuries (Kung, chp. 7). Usually the clergy and people of Rome, as well as the emperor, pronounced the verdict deposing a pope. It is well known that the notorious “Western Schism”, which saw several claimants to the papal office and threatened to dissolve the Church, was only resolved by the Council of Constance (1415). This council was referred to by Popes Paul VI and John Paul II as “ecumenical”. In deposing or forcing the

resignation of the rival claimants to the papal office, the council asserted that it had "immediate power from Christ", which all, including the pope, "must obey in what concerns faith, the eradication of the...schism and the reformation of the said Church". Consequently, all the decrees of the council, up to the election of Martin V (1417), were drawn up exclusively in the name of the council. Whereas the ordinary government of the Church is to be handled by the pope, in such grave crises or limit situations the council has the right and duty to intervene.

Even after Vatican I (1870), the canonical manuals held that a pope would lose office⁶: a) If he were found to be suffering from serious mental illness. One thinks today such diseases as schizophrenia and Alzheimer's. Indeed, some popes are suspected of having suffered from pathological conditions. b) If he became a heretic, as recorded above. One could think of other possible conflict situations, such as the internment of a pope during a political upheaval, or a papal election of doubtful legitimacy due to the non-observance of canonical provisions or the exercise of pressure. In order to resolve such situations, a council would have to be convoked, if not by the pope, then by the college of cardinals or by the consensus of the episcopate. After all, the Petrine office exists for the Church and not viceversa. The Church does have a structure which can be activated to defend itself against a pope who sought to destroy it. This was taught by St. Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), Cardinal and Doctor of the Church. He said that Church would be in a sorry state if she had to recognize an openly raging "wolf" as her "shepherd" (Kung, 343).

3.2 *Need of a new canon ?*

Accordingly, it would seem that we need a new canon, which would indicate the conditions under which an appeal may be preferred, over the bishop of Rome, to a General Council or to the college of bishops. This would be consonant with the fact that the college of bishops, inclusive of its head,⁷ "is the subject of supreme and full power over the universal

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6. Resignation by the pope is acknowledged in C. 332/2, provided it is done freely and is duly manifested. In certain circumstances a controversy could arise as to whether the pope had resigned freely.
 7. This condition would not hold in the special situations enumerated above, as also in a conclave which elects a pope.

Church" (LG 22). In their own dioceses, bishops enjoy "ordinary, proper and immediate authority" (CD 8/a). They are "vicars of Christ" (LG 27). They are not vicars or officials or tools of the pope, nor do they rule with delegated power. Hence they should behave "like brothers of the pope, not under-age sons" (Concilium, 157/7-1982, p. 4). The bishop of Rome also enjoys the same "supreme and full" jurisdiction, only in so far as he acts as *head* of the body of bishops.

Unfortunately Vatican I concluded prematurely after affirming papal primacy, without having been able to explain at equal length the nature and role of the episcopate. Furthermore, the conditions for the exercise of the primacy were not as clearly circumscribed as for infallibility. Yet the Deputation for the Faith explained to the council Fathers, that the pope's authority is not arbitrary, but subject to natural and divine law; this would include the episcopate. In an earlier draft of *Lumen Gentium*, Paul VI proposed that the following be inserted, namely that the pope is "answerable to the Lord alone" in his action. This was rejected by the Theological Commission, for the reason that "the Roman Pontiff is also bound to revelation itself, to the fundamental structure of the Church, to the sacraments, to the definitions of earlier councils and other obligations too numerous to mention" (Vorgrimler, 202).

It is hoped that these observations will contribute to a proper evaluation of the above mentioned canons.

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